The BRIGHTON BOYS in TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT

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THE BRIGHTON BOYS SERIES

BY

LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE FLYING CORPS

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE TRENCHES

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE BATTLE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE RADIO SERVICE

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE SUBMARINE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE ENGINEERS AT CANTIGNY

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
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AT ST. MIHIEL

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE ARGONNE

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE SUBMARINE TREASURE SHIP

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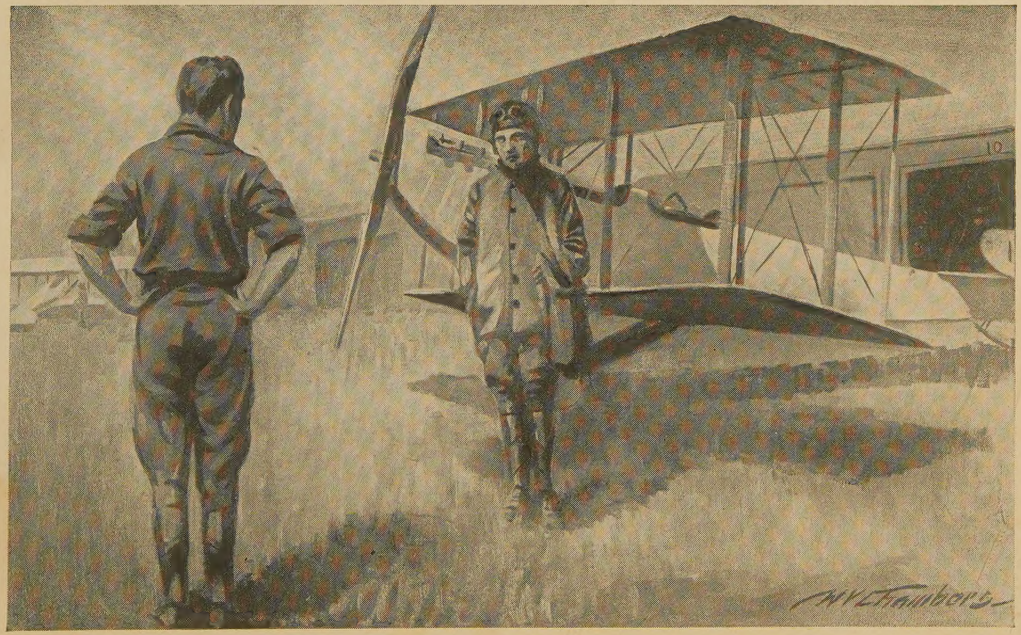

"Excuse Me, but Your Control Wires are not Right."

The BRIGHTON BOYS in Transatlantic Flight

BY
LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

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The Brighton Boys in Transatlantic Flight

CHAPTER I

Waiting for the Hop-Off

"BR-R-R-R, but this is a chilly section of the map!"

The speaker was Jack Carew—Big Jack Carew, they had called him at Brighton. The descriptive prefix had clung to him throughout all the changes and vicissitudes of the Great War, and the indications were now that he would continue to be known as Big Jack Carew through the balance of his natural life.

And well he deserved the cognomen, for as he stood in the doorway of the little shack-like building in which he and his three comrades had spent their first night in Halifax, he showed up well over six feet in height, with a depth of chest and breadth of shoulder which bespoke tremendous strength and almost unlimited physical endurance.

Indeed, it was a fact well known to scores of men that but for Carew's possession of these two qualities, coupled with his timely arrival at a desolate and isolated spot in

northern France one bitterly cold night in January, 1918, Donald Harlan would not have been alive to be in Newfoundland now as a member of the American crew which Carew captained, and which was even now making ready for participation in the first Transatlantic aeroplane contest.

The story was a somewhat old one now, but Harlan himself never tired of giving his big chum full credit for having saved his life. Harlan had been in battle with a Hun plane, and although he had come off victorious, he had sustained such damage to his own machine that he was compelled to make a speedy landing in which the law of gravity figured more prominently than did his own control over wings, elevators and rudder. The inevitable result was a smash-up, with Harlan on the very bottom of the débris. There he had lain for four hours, barely conscious, half frozen, and bleeding from a dozen serious cuts, when Big Jack Carew, out on a lone reconnoitering expedition afoot, had by the merest accident come upon him.

It was five miles from that spot to the nearest dressing station, and it was partly enemy territory at that; but Carew had carried the injured man the entire distance in no more

time than it would have taken the ordinary unburdened man to do it, and the surgeons had said afterward that it was only this quick rescue work that had prevented a loss of blood which would have cost Donald Harlan his life.

No wonder that Big Jack Carew was admired, respected, loved by all who knew him, and especially so by the three other men who made up his crew.

As he stood now, after his abrupt appearance and brief remark about the Halifax weather, silhouetted in the open doorway by the meager Newfoundland dawn, the trio of lads within the one-room building looked up suddenly from their respective tasks with smiling nods of greeting.

Fred Bentner, the wizard wireless operator, who had won his right to that title by his many feats of efficiency with the radio key and earpiece, was for the fiftieth time re-inspecting an expensive and highly-prized fleece-lined leather coat which had been presented to him just before the crew had left the States for the bleak Newfoundland shore from which the flight was scheduled to start.

A few feet away Don Harlan was down on his hands and knees, cramped into a most

uncomfortable position, almost exhausted from blowing an auxiliary draft into the grate of a balky stove, on which Andy Flures with equal difficulty and no greater success was endeavoring to fry four husky portions of ham and eggs.

Harlan was the navigator of the American crew, while jolly Andy Flures was alternate pilot with Big Jack. The four of them made a most happy and congenial group, and at the same time an aggregation of experienced birdmen to give just cause for anxiety to the contestants of any other nationality.

"Hey, you!" Donald commanded, when he had sufficiently recovered from his arduous efforts to talk. "No charge for admission, you know. Come inside and shut the door. Permit me to give you my place. You've got more lung power than I have; maybe you can put the spark of life into this stove. If I may be pardoned for the perpetration of an innocent pun, you may thereby blow us all to a substantial refreshment of 'ham-and.'"

He arose and, with a most stately bow and wave of the hand, proffered the position of honor and place of official stove-blower to his erstwhile rescuer.

"Nothing doing," responded the huge

Carew, with good-natured emphasis. "I'm no blow-hard."

Nevertheless he immediately dropped his heavy bulk to where Donald's most persuasive puffing had failed to stir the fire to even the faintest indications of enthusiasm.

"Say," queried Big Jack, when he had taken a long and judicial squint into the dull glow within the grate, "what are you trying to burn in this stove—asbestos? Pity you three poor weaklings couldn't even get a breakfast while I'm doing the early bird stuff, out scouting for the real news."

With which he settled himself in place for the first gusty blast at the grate.

"What is the news? Did you get any? Don't be selfish about it—let the rest of us hear it," they fired at him, almost in unison.

Carew merely grunted. His expanding chest burst a button from his coat, and it went bouncing across the floor to a further corner of the room. He was getting ready to go into action, was Big Jack Carew, and he never did anything half-heartedly.

"What'd you get?" demanded Donald Harlan again, impatient to know of the slightest hint or tip or bit of speculative gossip that might throw the least light upon the all-

important question of when they might start upon the first aeroplane journey ever attempted across the Atlantic.

But he had scarcely uttered the query when there was a miniature explosion like the blow-out of a 35x5 automobile tire under ninety pounds pressure, followed by a very audible grunt and a reflex cloud of cinders and ashes which for the moment entirely enveloped and obscured the tremendous proportions of Big Jack Carew. The first sound thereafter was a muffled gasp from that person; and when finally the ash cloud had sufficiently settled, the first view the other youths had of Carew he was pawing viciously at eyes, nose and ears with both hands.

"What'd I get?" he repeated, in genuine bad humor for the moment. "I got gas and liquid fire all in one. Don't ask me what I got. Can't you see! I think somebody touched a match to old Vesuvius. Here, one of you fellows pump this old stove. I give it too much energy."

But as he found that he still retained the vision of both eyes, that he could hear as well as ever, and could even breathe through his nose, although with some difficulty, his natural good nature asserted itself and he joined in

the no-wise gentle guffaws of Andy Flures and the milder laughter of the other two.

"Holy smoke is right," Jack ejaculated; and then, improvising:

"Ashes to ashes,
And dust to dust,
If the Huns don't get you
An old stove must."

Nevertheless, despite his unpleasant experience, Carew's efforts had been successful, and he had, indeed, imparted the spark of life to the fire. It was now crackling and blazing right merrily, to the accompanying sizzle of the frying ham and eggs. And in five more minutes the four young men were seated at table, putting those same ham and eggs beyond hope of redemption. There was nothing whatever the matter with their appetites.

"Well, you haven't yet told us what you learned while you were out scouting around this morning," Fred Bentner prompted Big Jack.

"Nothing definite, of course," Carew replied. "But everybody's here, ready and anxious for the hop-off. The Henryson people are awfully confident of the staying powers of their single-engine machine; and the

Falcon crew is just as strong for that type. But I want to tell you that for both speed and endurance, as well as for safety and emergencies, I believe our dual motor hydro has got them all topped, and that, all other things being equal, we'll beat them to it when the real contest comes."

"Righto!" echoed Andy Flures.

"And may that not long be delayed," added Donald Harlan.

"Were you down to the freight station?" Fred asked, seeming naturally to take the rôle of interrogator.

"Yes, and there is some stuff there for us that came in during the night," Carew answered. "But I doubt whether our elevator will get here before tomorrow. However, there isn't any real rush, and I think we did the right thing in deciding to risk that delay in order to have that light copper binding put on. The stress of a sudden storm may prove its value."

"Sure," Donald supplemented. "No room for argument about that. But we don't want to let any other crew get the jump on us at that. There's an awful lot of satisfaction in being the first off, or at least to be among the first.",

"I don't think any other crew will be able to make a get-away before we are ready," Jack assured them. "Why, I was talking to a native a while ago on that very subject. He doesn't pretend to know anything about aeronautics. He's been a whaler all his life. But he does set himself up as something of a weather sharp, and after having listened to him for quite a time I'm more than half inclined to believe that he knows what he is talking about. Weather prognostications seem to be a natural instinct with whalers, you know, and with this fellow you might call it a sixth sense."

"Well, what did he say?" Don interrupted.

"That we wouldn't get away before the end of this week, anyway, and likely not until the middle of next, if then," Jack finished.

"Yes," said Andy, "the mud's so deep in front of two of the hangars that there isn't a chance of running the machines out until it has dried off a great deal."

"Well, the ham and eggs being gone, I'm through," interjected Fred. "Let's all hustle down to the *dee-po* and see what Santa Claus left us during the night. I'm anxious to get our craft together, and particularly to make some necessary final tests with the radio apparatus."

"Right!" agreed Jack, surveying the table rather ruefully and becoming convinced that Fred was right about there being no more ham and eggs. "And don't make any mistakes about that wireless, either, Fred," he continued, as they all shoved back their chairs. "I've got all sorts of confidence in our plane, but nevertheless it would be nice to realize that we could let the world at large know our approximate whereabouts in case we should come down in old Father Neptune's lap, somewhere in about the dead center of the Atlantic."

"It'll be as right as every other part of our vehicle when we start," the wireless expert assured them; and with that they set off for the freight station.

A short distance down the street they encountered Henryson, the Norwegian pilot of a giant single-motor machine of great horsepower, and known to be capable of tremendous speed. Never a popular fellow, Henryson's cocksureness in the present contest made him more than ever disliked by his competitors in the approaching flight.

The others would have passed him with merely a nod of greeting, but Henryson showed a disposition toward conversation, and they

had no alternative within the bounds of courtesy but to stop.

"Willing to put down a little money to make this flight interesting?" he asked, addressing himself particularly to Big Jack Carew.

"Nope, never bet," Carew replied good-naturedly. "But we'll make it interesting, all right, once we get started. You may be assured of that."

"Sort of proud, eh?" Henryson suggested, evidently intent upon being as nasty as possible.

"No, not proud, but awfully confident," Jack responded quietly, but with a note of distinct warning in his tone.

Henryson's answer was almost a sneer. "There are several ways of making things interesting," and he strode on past.

"I'll wager he's one of the meanest men in Canada," said Fred Bentner, turning to look after Henryson.

"Wonder what he meant by that last remark," added Don. "Sounded like a veiled threat to me."

"Huh," said Big Jack. "I guess there's no cause for alarm. Barking dogs seldom bite, you know."

They continued on to the freight station

and there found that practically their entire equipment had arrived, and that they now had before them a day to be devoted almost entirely to getting their plane together, to be followed by all sorts of strength and endurance tests. To the former task they applied themselves just as soon as the parts could be transferred from the station to their hangar, and throughout the ensuing hours there was the most enthusiastic energy, not only among our friends from Brighton, but as well in the immediate vicinity of every other hangar.

Crowds witnessed the eager preparations that were going forward for the first attempt at crossing the Atlantic through the air; while by automobile truck and dray, tons upon tons of fuel and oil were being brought up to the point where the machines soon would take on the fuel, lubricants, food, etc., necessary to the flight.

By nightfall the giant two-motor combination hydro-aeroplane was practically completed, and Big Jack announced that they would begin putting aboard oil and petrol that night, preparatory to complete tryouts the following morning. These things done, and the crew would be ready for its long fly across

the ocean just as soon as sufficient tonnage of fuel and oil were aboard.

"Well, it's coming close to the finals, anyway," announced Carew as they knocked off work and went to their shack for supper. "By this time tomorrow night, barring accidents or such weather as would prevent tests, we will be ready for the start. How about the wireless, Fred?"

"All set up, ready for the most exacting experiments tomorrow," the radio expert replied.

Just as he was speaking, Henryson passed by. He looked at the group, but did not say a word.

"I wish that fellow would stay out of my sight," said Donald Harlan impatiently. "I don't like his face."

Big Jack laughed deprecatingly, but nevertheless he, too, turned to look after the Norwegian, whose words and manner had caused a sort of uneasiness with all of the lads.

"All I've got to say," said Andy Flures, "is that he had better mind his own business or we'll make it hot, as well as interesting, for him and his crew."

CHAPTER II

Arrival of a Stranger

NOT always, and in fact seldom, are things so important and unusual as a Transatlantic aerial flight, to be carried out strictly according to prearranged plans and schedule.

Long before the final details of this great expedition had been decided upon, careful students of flying had foreseen that preliminary to the establishment of that method of transport as one of the dependable arts of commerce, the study of the air, the weather, and atmospheric conditions generally, would have to advance farther than it ever has thus far, and that upon that knowledge aeroplanes and dirigibles in passenger and freight service would be operated upon schedules almost as regular as those of our railroads and steamship lines today; more like the latter, however, in that seasonal conditions would largely govern arrivals and departures.

In other words, that the study of atmospheric conditions would make it possible to

know, from the average that had obtained over, say, a period of five or ten years, about what sort of weather might be expected to prevail at every important flight point, or over every regular flying route, throughout every part of the year.

Such a study, so far as it had been possible to advance it, had been made prior to the present proposed flight, and the schedule was arranged for what was believed would be the most propitious time in the year, both for the start and for the conditions expected to be encountered once the planes had left sight of America and had started upon the long, perilous and uncharted course across the Atlantic Ocean.

But alas, as the poet said, for "the best-laid plans of mice and men."

Contrary to every plan and calculation, in direct opposition to every hope and prediction, it had rained with only occasional and brief interruptions for the greater part of three days and three nights, and now, on this, the morning of the fifth day since the crews had arrived at Halifax, the first promise of better weather was held forth in a stiff breeze that was blowing from the northwest.

And as well may be imagined, this first

sign of relief had not come too soon. As a matter of fact, a blue funk had prevailed over the entire camp ever since the storm had set in. It hadn't been so bad at first, when there were a hundred and one things that each crew could find to do in the way of big and little details looking to increased speed, efficiency and safety throughout the trip.

But when each man of each crew finally had to admit his imagination exhausted in finding such work with which to pass the time, then came the long, slow, nerve-racking, patience-killing, disposition-spoiling wait, in which they could only attempt to console one another with predictions of an early clearing, in which they only half believed themselves.

Checkers, chess, and improvised shuffleboard and hand-ball had been resorted to, even to the extent of a checker tournament in which every crew had its entry and Dave Bemis, of the Falcon outfit, had carried off the camp honors and the admitted championship.

But, faced with the responsibilities of succeeding in a non-stop ocean flight of approximately two thousand miles, these were small and ineffective diversions, and in the indoor games many a man had made his moves

mechanically and abstractedly, giving proof to the old saying that he was, mentally at least, "up in the air."

Now, under the most favorable conditions, it was bound to be two or three days longer before the flight could start, but there was at least the encouragement that it was a definite prospect.

"Say, fellows," said Andy Flures, entering their hangar after the fifth weather survey he had made in the last hour, "I'll tell you what let's do. There isn't another tap of work of any sort that I know of that can be put on our plane, and we've still got a lot of time on our hands. What do you say if we try to get some of the others together for some field sports—running, jumping, pole vault and track—regular old-fashioned all-round contest like we used to have at Brighton?"

"Andy, you're a wonder," ejaculated Fred Bentner, immediately enthusiastic. "Why, it's just what we need to limber up our muscles and put new ginger into us. We've been sitting around moping too long already."

"Yes," agreed Big Jack, "if by some chance or accident it should develop that we should start upon the flight today we're in no mental

condition for it. Our minds are groggy. We've sort of gone sour. We want to limber up our joints, as Fred says, and at the same time get our grouches out of our systems. Nothing like a real athletic contest for that."

"I'm with you heart and soul," echoed Donald Harlan. "Let's sound the others out right away."

And then and there they appointed each other committees of one to visit the other crews to get the thing started.

Half an hour later a score of young men, ruddy of complexion, clear of eye, supple of action, men who did not know the meaning of physical fear, were gathered together in the spirit of schoolboys on the big field that fronted the giant hangars in which were stored the powerful machines that soon were to vie with each other, even as now their pilots and mechanics were about to do, in a historical contest of the air.

By unanimous agreement Dr. Charles P. Vorhees, now a sedate and high-salaried official in Uncle Sam's Weather Bureau, but a few years ago a well-known athletic star at Yale, was made referee of the contests. His own reputation in athletics had been such as to preclude even a suspicion of partisan-

ship or favoritism in his decisions, and further than that he was personally popular with every air-man there.

"Let's make at least part of this contest different from the average," suggested Dr. Vorhees, as the men gathered about to hear his suggestions. "Men in your line of work expect and even seek the unusual, rather than the ordinary. You get your thrills out of doing new things. Very well, then, instead of trying to lay out a track over the driest parts of the field, let's select a course over the soggiest sections, and then have a race with some real difficulties in it."

"Sure; just the thing," came half a dozen voices in unison.

And then the brilliant mind of Archie Brown, of the Falcon crew, added another novel thought.

"Why not do it on showshoes?" he offered. "The going is heavy enough, and that ought to help make it unusual."

"Gee! Snowshoeing in the mud! Corking idea!"

The chorus of approval left no doubt that in this aggregation no task was regarded as really hard, no difficulty as insurmountable.

"But where would we get the snowshoes?"

asked Dr. Vorhees, shaking with laughter as he surveyed the heavily mudded field, and already seeing in prospect the ludicrous probabilities of such a contest as Brown had suggested.

"Leave it to me," the latter replied. "It was having seen twenty or thirty pairs only last night that brought the thing to my mind."

He trotted off across the field, to where a bleak building stood out uninvitingly against the horizon. It was the general storehouse of the coast guard station at that point, and was in charge of the ex-whaling captain with whom Big Jack Carew had discussed Newfoundland weather conditions on his first morning there. And the former whaler, it proved, was as good a sport as he was skipper.

"Would he lend Archie Brown the twenty pairs of snowshoes which that youth had seen stowed away there one day while he was holding a lengthy conversation with the old salt?"

Of course, the question wasn't put or repeated in just that language, but that was its full purport. Would he? Well, the genial sailor of the northern seas rubbed his stubbled chin for a moment, listened while Archie outlined in detail the purpose for which the

shoes were desired, wrinkled his brow, shifted his "chaw" from the right cheek to the left, squinted out to where the foregathered flyers awaited his decision—and then he offered a sort of compromise. He would lend the shoes, providing he was permitted to lay out the course. No particular reason, of course. Oh, no! Just wanted to sort of have a hand in the thing, so to speak.

Well, he did. He had a hand in it, and, as it developed later, the others were in with both feet. But that's getting ahead too rapidly.

With the captain following more slowly, Archie raced across the field to inform the others of the condition under which the snowshoes had been loaned. In a jiffy they agreed that certainly they would grant an ancient mariner's small whim like that. Why not? Anyway, it was necessary, in order to get the shoes.

And so, when the erstwhile whaler joined the group, he immediately was informed by Dr. Vorhees that they waited upon him, as an honored and in ormed native, to indicate a foot-race course over which some eager young men, equipped with snowshoes, might, perhaps, encounter some difficulties to add zest to the friendly encounter.

"Seein's ye cain't hev the shoes 'nless ye meet thet condition, I'm not going to be perticerly het up about th' honor yer conferin'," answered the weather-beaten old salt callously. "But I thenk ye, nevertheless."

He stepped to the front of the group, so that they formed a semicircle about him.

"See thet old stump of a tree stickin' up out thar?" he asked, indicating with outstretched right arm the distant skeleton of what once had been a towering cedar.

"Yes," answered half a dozen, following the direction in which he pointed, almost due east.

"Wall, then," the old captain continued, "we'll consider the course a straight line to thet 'ere stump, and then, roundin' that, straight off to thet other healthier tree up thar," indicating a point fully three hundred yards north of the dead cedar, "and then straight back here."

The twenty young men began lacing on the snowshoes which Archie and the captain had brought with them.

"Ye can make any other conditions ye want," the latter added, "but if I'm not mistaken thet'll take ye some time—an' prove yer mettle."

It was not until later that they realized why

he chuckled so after making this final remark. They went ahead with their preparations. Some of the youths had had considerable experience in snowshoeing; others had never had a pair upon their feet. It is safe to say, however, that none of them ever set out upon such a trip with them before.

As they stood in line ready for the start, the old whaling captain uttered his final admonition. "Around thet old stump, remember, and from there up to thet big tree, then home. An' remember thet old rule of 'rithmetic—the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Straight from thet stump to the tree." He looked at Dr. Vorhees, gave a sly wink which none but that individual saw, and a moment later the lumbering men were off.

For the first five minutes the going was not hard, although for the inexperienced there were unsuspected difficulties and time after time one or another of them, placing the desire for speed above caution, got suddenly stuck, and then of natural momentum went headlong into the mud, at the same time experiencing sudden and disconcerting stretching and straining of the muscles and tendons of their legs.

In the next ten minutes it became a straggling line, with the more expert in the lead, the novices laboring along with many a grunt of surprise and disgust, but all staying gamely in the contest, in spite of all the unexpected handicaps it developed.

But as the three leaders in the race reached and rounded the old stump they became suddenly and painfully aware of the trick which the shrewd old whaler had played upon them. These leaders were Big Jack Carew, the unpopular Henryson, and a navigator named George Boardman. Behind them the long and irregularly progressing line was a ludicrous manifestation of human determination and endeavor, under the most unexpected forms of surprises and handicaps; for the course, even over its first leg, was not merely a stretch of muddy field, but an uninterrupted succession of treacherous hidden bogs and marshes, whose surfaces were apparently but patches of juicy mud.

Around the stump, however, the character of the course became even worse, and it wasn't long before those in the lead realized that they were in reality treading the bed, or rather channel, of a recently-formed miniature creek.

"No fool, that fellow," growled Boardman, puffing laboriously to extricate one foot that seemed to be drawn down into the ground with the tenacious pull and grip of a suction pump. "He's got the laugh on us all right."

"Who-o-r-rp!" Henryson, a little in the lead, turning for an instant to make a reply, had miscalculated grievously, and now, a victim of his own folly in having even for a second taken his eyes from his course, was lying face downward in a morass of slimy mud, his arms working like the paddle wheels of a ferryboat.

There was a shout of derisive laughter from behind, as there had been every time any one had, as Donald expressed it, "bitten the dust." But Henryson, naturally a poor sport and sour-natured, was doubly angered and chagrined not alone by the stagnant depths into which his unhappy disaster had precipitated him, but also by the fact that he had lost the lead and at least three others were now ahead of him. It was left to happy Andy Flures to reap the full measure of the Norwegian's wrath.

Three times Andy himself had been down in the mud, but each time he had come up smiling and more determined than ever to finish the race.

"Why the tail-dip?" he asked of Henryson as he came up; and there was another gale of laughter.

Henryson's color rose and showed through pink, even under his facial covering of mire. He muttered something under his breath, and then, instead of being cooled by that brief outlet to his anger, completely lost control of himself.

He suddenly bent forward, as though to tighten his shoe, grasped a handful of mud, and before Andy could realize his intention or even shield himself from it, Henryson hurled it, striking Flures squarely in the face.

There was a gasp from the men behind, and a shout of anger from the old whaling captain. Involuntarily everyone came to a halt.

Like most good-natured people, Andy Flures was not a man to be insulted in that way. With dangerous calm and precision he removed the plastered mud from his eyes, and then, never wavering, but without undue haste, stalked over to where Henryson stood. And before that individual was aware of what was happening to him, Andy grabbed him in an iron grip, turned him upside down as though Henryson weighed no more than a

doll, and then, with a tremendous lunge, planted him head-first into the slime, up to his shoulders.

It seemed a full minute he stood thus, his feet threshing the air, before he sufficiently unbalanced to fall of his own weight.

When Henryson had finally regained his feet and could see and hear, the old whaling captain was standing in front of him. The others, including Andy, at his signal, were continuing over the designated course, but all could hear him as he bawled out at the Norwegian:

"Young man, take off them shoes."

Without a word Henryson began to do as he was bidden.

"Now lissen here," the old whaler continued, as Henryson handed him the snowshoes that had been the cause of his misfortune and such a nasty display of humor. "When I laid out this course it was my idea to see a little fun. I knew it would be soggy goin', but I thought I was dealin' with sportsmen, and I was—all except you. You're my idea of a no-account, that's what you are."

Before this tirade from a man nearly thrice his age Henryson stood abashed.

"And one thing more," the old seaman

continued. "There was once a man named Shakespeare, that it might surprise you to know I ever heard of. Well, around here I'm what he called 'clothed with a little brief authority.' I'm the constabule. I'm not het up about it, but I want to tell ye this: you get the slightest bit gay around this harbor and I'll run ye into the calaboose so quick ye won't know what happened to ye. And ye won't be out in time to make eny flight to Europe, either; though if ye ever git there I hope ye stay."

Henryson, a lone and ostracized man, stalked across the field just as Big Jack Carew, laughing and puffing, came in a winner, twenty yards ahead of the next nearest man.

Thereafter there were broad-jumps, high-jumps, pole-vault contests and many other tryouts in athletic skill, but it remained for Fred Bentner to show them something in the way of novelty in almost monkey-like agility.

There stood at the upper end of the big field two strong, permanent upright posts, with a horizontal bar fastened to them about eight feet above the ground. At one time it had been used for the purposes of winding cable. Jumping and catching this lateral bar, Fred began twirling about it with such

speed that his body looked most like the rapidly-revolving blade of a propeller.

Then, when he was going so rapidly that it did not seem that he possibly could know his exact and instantaneous position, he suddenly let go, and, to the gasps of the men who were looking on, shot off through the air at a horizontal tangent.

Swift as an arrow his body hurtled through space. Thirty feet away he landed, feet up, as though he had taken but an ordinary broad-jump.

"Bravo!" came surprised and wondering shouts.

"Measure it," said Fred, quietly, joining the others.

They did. "Thirty-three feet," announced Dr. Vorhees, "and I'd call it some stunt."

It was nearing sunset when the final contests of this novel field day were brought to a conclusion, but every man who had participated in it, with the exception of Henryson, felt a hundredfold better for the physical exertions they had been through. It proved to be a mental as well as a physical tonic.

But final events, as proved later, turned out to be most significant.

It was long after dark when the four young men, returning to their hut from that of

another crew, were brought to a sudden halt a hundred feet away from their own hangar.

"What's that?" Big Jack had whispered, at the same time attracting the attention of the other three to a form barely discernible in the night, as it skulked along in the dense shadow of the big building.

"It's a man, and apparently bent on no good," said Andy Flures, at the same time starting for the hangar on a run, followed closely by the others.

But they were too late. The intruder, whoever he was and whatever his errand, had discovered them at the same time they had seen him and had made his escape in the night. They searched for fifteen minutes, but in vain. They went inside, and found everything apparently exactly as they had left it.

"Well, that's a queer one," said Big Jack, as they sat around discussing it before retiring. "The fellow might have meant no harm at all, but we're at least on our guard against any trickery."

"Yes," agreed Don, "and for one I'm in favor of going over every inch of our plane tomorrow."

And with that excellent precaution agreed upon, they went to bed.

CHAPTER III

Treachery Afoot

IT was perhaps four hours later, or a little after midnight, when all four of the young men were suddenly and simultaneously aroused from their peaceful slumbers by the loud clanging of a gong.

No need to ask what it was, even when coming out of a deep sleep. It was a fire bell, and pealing out in quick, insistent warning calls!

"Great guns!" shouted Fred Bentner, the first out of his bunk and to a window. "There's a fire all right, and it's over at the hangars."

The wild scrimmage which followed was probably repeated in every one of the half dozen near-by huts in which the respective crews were quartered.

Big Jack Carew went crashing out the door, still drawing his shirt over his head and wearing only one shoe. Don, in his own excitement, had kicked the other under a cot, and Carew had refused to take time to look for

it. He was followed by Andy Flures, who certainly was not attired for a parlor reception; and the other two were only a few steps behind.

"I believe it's our own hangar," breathed Big Jack, his tones reflecting an agony of suspicion and suspense.

At that instant Bentner, who hadn't stopped for any shoes at all, stubbed his toe on a protruding rock.

"Holy cats!" he ejaculated, grabbing the injured foot and hopping along in terrible pain. "Oh, my golly, my toe!"

"Stick it in your pocket and come along," advised Andy, as he sped by.

Men were turning out of every hut in all sorts of garb, none of them fully clothed, some of them still in pajamas and whatever they could find first in the way of footwear. Meanwhile the great gong continued its clamor, there was the more strident banging of engine bells, and the townspeople came streaming forth, too, to add to the excitement.

And during this brief time little tongues of flame were leaping upward, apparently from the rear of the hangar in which was stored the great dual-motor plane in which our four friends hoped to be the first across the Atlantic.

The firemen were just getting a stream on the blaze when the youths arrived.

"Well, thank our lucky stars for that," exclaimed Don Harlan as he realized that, devilish as the evident plot had been, it had not succeeded to the point of setting fire to their hangar.

The blaze was in a large box of excelsior, which had been placed close to the rear boarding of the hangar. There was no doubt but that someone had set about deliberately to destroy that structure and the machine within. That the plan had not succeeded, it turned out later, was due to the fact that a private watchman, smelling smoke and tracing it to its source, had discovered the flames before they had entirely consumed the excelsior. He had pulled the big box a few feet away from the building and then had sounded the alarm.

The mystery lay in who wanted to destroy that hangar, and how he had dragged the box there without being discovered.

Extinguishing the fire was, of course, but a matter of a few moments. Immediate examination was made of the box. Unfortunately it had been partly consumed and the fire had, as fate would have it, eaten

away that particular part which undoubtedly would have revealed to whom originally it was consigned.

There was no question in the minds of anyone, however, but that it was one of the sort in which practically every crew that was to participate in the flight had received a part of its equipment.

"There's something rotten in Denmark, all right, to quote our friend Shakespeare again," said Big Jack Carew, "and it's plain enough that we've got to use every precaution against accident from now on. Somebody is trying to put us out of this contest. We might thank them for the compliment, but I wish they would just come out into the open sufficiently to reveal their identity."

"Well, there isn't any doubt in my mind that we frustrated the original plot ourselves," added Fred Bentner, who by this time had hobbled up, and had taken in the whole situation from the little he had seen and the snatch of conversation he had heard.

"Yes," agreed the other two. "No doubt about it now. The fellow we saw sneaking around here earlier in the night was bent upon mischief."

"And if I get my hands on him I'll have

him in the calaboose before he knows what's happened to him," added a voice from behind, and all four turned to confront Captain Isaac Allerson, late sailor of the northern seas, one-time whaling captain, and now, by virtue of the votes and confidence of his fellow-citizens, the town "constabule."

He looked at them significantly and there was something threatening in his attitude. They were not slow to remember where and under what circumstances they had heard practically those identical words before.

"Do you think—" Big Jack Carew began, and then stopped.

"Young man," the ex-whaler supplemented, "I'm thinkin' a whole lot of things I ain't sayin' just now. But you can bet yer last dollar that I'm keepin' both eyes peeled and both ears open."

Instinctively they gazed over the throng that still stood about, even though the fire was now entirely extinguished.

"Huh!" Captain Allerson exclaimed, and suddenly walked away.

In a moment he approached the unpopular, and at that moment unsuspecting, Henryson, who was standing on the outer edge of the crowd.

"That's strange," was the old seaman's expression, in a tone loud enough for all to hear, and attracting instant attention.

"What is?" asked Henryson, who could not ignore the fact that it was he who was being addressed. Bentner asked the others later if they, too, thought that a half-frightened look came into the Norwegian's eyes as the mentor of law and order addressed him.

"Why," Captain Allerson replied, slowly, and in bitingly incisive tones, "you seem to be about the only one around here that had time to stop and dress fer this here surprise party tonight."

Henryson muttered something about having been cold, and sleeping with his clothes on, and then abruptly turned and stalked away toward the hut he was occupying.

"Bad egg, that," growled the old sea captain, as he came over again to Big Jack and the members of his crew.

But he had time for no more, for the members of the other crews had gathered around to congratulate the youths on the fact that the fire had been discovered in time, and to speculate as to who the villain was who had tried to burn them out.

True sportsmen that they were, the young

men said nothing of their suspicions, and the others, if they shared such thoughts, kept them to themselves.

There was instant agreement, however, that with a skulking incendiary around, no hangar or its valuable contents was safe, and that the best insurance against a hidden foe lay in a constant night patrol by at least two men. It was arranged, therefore, that two would continue such watchfulness throughout that night, and that thereafter, until the flight began, this vigilance would be kept up by two men on duty throughout the entire time from sunset to sunrise, each couple doing duty for four hours.

In the drawing of lots which followed, Don Harlan and a man named Joe Harrity were selected to patrol the hangar section throughout the balance of that night; and this was completely satisfactory to all concerned, for they were equally popular and trusted among their fellow aviators.

Naturally, with the entire town so aroused, not even the boldest malefactor would be expected to pay another pilgrimage to the scene of his attempted work of arson that same night, and nothing further happened, although both Don and Harrity held secret

hopes that the fellow would put in an appearance, so that they might at the same time learn his identity and his motive.

Early in the morning Jack, Fred and Andy had a hasty breakfast and then hurried to the hangar just as Don was returning to snatch a few hours' sleep to make up for the long vigil.

"See anything further?" Jack asked.

"No," Don answered. "The fellow, whoever he is, didn't return, but I wish he had."

"Well, we're going over every inch of that plane today," Jack informed him. "But I've just been thinking that it might be best not to say anything; in fact, to make it seem that our suspicions have been lulled to sleep."

"Yes," said Don, "I'm inclined to believe, with you, that that is our best method of self-protection."

"All right, then, we'll say nothing to anybody. If we discover anything it may help us to solve this mystery."

Don continued to the hut, where he warmed up the breakfast the other three had left for him. Meanwhile they were at the hangar, beginning their minute examination of their plane.

It was well toward noon, and when they

were coming to the conclusion that no matter what might have been the designs against them, none had been successfully carried out, when Andy made a sudden exclamation which brought the others to his side.

For more than an hour he and Jack had gone over the engine together, while Fred had made every possible test of the electrical and radio equipment. Jack and Fred were at this time examining the elevators and rudder, and Andy was going over the fusilage, carefully inspecting every inch of strut and frame work, and by accident had laid his hand on one of the main bracing wires. His trained touch had brought the involuntary exclamation.

"What is it?" Jack asked, as nearly excited as he ever permitted himself to get.

For a moment Andy did not reply. When he did it was to ask the others to come closer.

"Look at this," he said, pointing with index finger to a place far up on the bracing wire.

Now it may be explained here that for the purposes of strength and endurance these wires are made up of many smaller strands, finely twisted together. Sometimes one of these strands will break, and often a careless aviator, or an over-confident one, or one who

does not want to subject himself to what he regards as an unnecessary delay, although he knows the danger inherent in such a course, will clip off the broken strand, close up to the main wire of which it is a part, and do the job so well that even a trained inspector might not easily discover how, to save time, he was endangering his own safety and perhaps the lives of others.

During the war, when often time was the main objective, when danger was laughed at, and even human life was valued cheaply, many an aviator came to his death through a collapse of his machine directly due to the fact that he or other aviators, perhaps over a considerable period, had clipped off and thus hidden so many broken strands in a single wire that finally it broke completely, perhaps telescoping the entire machine.

In this instance Andy had discovered at least half a dozen broken and carefully hidden strands of a single important bracing wire, and there was no doubt that it had been done deliberately by someone planning the ruin of that plane long after it was on its way from America to Europe.

For a moment the very dastardliness of the deed was so disconcerting that the three

youths found themselves speechless. There was no doubt of the meaning of the discovery. The plot was a daring one to defeat this machine and crew in the race, and it had been designed and carried into effect in a way that, had it not been discovered in time, probably would have cost them their lives.

"Well," ejaculated Jack, the first to recover himself. "Somebody certainly loves us."

"Yes," said Andy, "they wish us well—well out of the way."

From the window they could see Donald approaching, refreshed by his morning's nap.

"Let's wait until he gets here," Fred suggested, "and then hold a council of war."

In a few words Donald was told of the situation. At first they thought it would be well to take Captain Allerson into their confidence, but on calmer consideration they agreed that he might inadvertently drop the tip, and then, after all, the culprit might not be caught, with the resulting danger that this or some other machine would start upon the flight mortally crippled, destined never to reach Europe.

"Better keep the thing to ourselves for a day or two, anyway," was Jack's counsel,

"and then determine how we are to let the others know."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Fred Bentner, his countenance set determinedly and a glint in his fine eyes. "I'm just going to fix this machine so that anyone who touches it will stay here until we arrive."

"How?" asked Andy Flures.

"I'm going to charge every metallic part with a sufficient voltage of good old electric juice to give the shock of his life to anyone who lays his hands upon those parts," Fred answered.

"That's the best idea yet," agreed Jack enthusiastically. "That is, providing you can give it sufficient voltage."

"Well," Fred went on, "I'll connect up enough of the juice that even if it won't hold a man it'll bring such a surprised yell out of him that anybody within a hundred yards will know he has touched something hot."

CHAPTER IV

The Tamperer Captured

As a preliminary to his plans for catching this dangerous meddler red-handed if he ever returned to meddle again, Fred first asked Big Jack to return to their hut and bring up to the hangar a box of heavy and powerful auxiliary batteries which had come to them by express, to be carried along on their flight for use in any emergency in which the electrical equipment of their plane, either with respect to engine or radio service, might go wrong.

While Jack was on this errand, Fred set Donald to work digging a hole beneath the plane large enough to contain this battery box when it should arrive.

With the aid of Andy he began the secret wiring of the plane in such a way that the wires could be charged without danger of damage to any of the vital parts of the plane—and it may be said here that practically every part of an aeroplane not only is essentially vital, but vitally essential.

When Jack returned, rather breathless from lugging a load that a weaker man could not have managed, they carefully wrapped the battery box in an oilcloth tarpaulin, to prevent any damage to it from the dampness of the ground, then buried it with only the wires protruding, and with still a layer of two inches of dirt to be put on after a single small cable of many insulated strands had been attached.

Fred then took a length of heavy ordinary hemp rope, a little longer than sufficient to reach from one of the bracing wires to the ground. From this bracing wire he directly and indirectly connected up every metallic part of the aeroplane, except the engine.

He then heated a small straight iron rod almost white hot, and, with a bucket of water close at hand, forced the hot rod through the center of the strand of rope, immediately dropping the latter into the bucket to prevent it from burning through.

By this time his scheme was becoming apparent. He ran the cable of wire through the rope, attached one end to the batteries, then completed their concealment and finally hung the strand of rope over the fusilage of the plane as though it had been carelessly

tossed there, but with a complete connection established.

No one, without picking the rope up for careful examination, could possibly have detected or even suspected its purpose. It just looked as though it had been left there for no particular purpose whatever.

Fred then went to the engine, did a few secret tricks that he knew of there, and then turned on the battery switch of the plane.

"Now," he said, "I think the trap's all set for our friend, the enemy. Let us hope he walks into it."

He gathered up all the tools and implements with which he had been working, carefully replaced them where they belonged, with his own hands again smoothed off the ground where the auxiliary battery box had been buried, and then, with a final survey of his surroundings and a gentle pat or two to the rope, pronounced their work completed.

"Let's go eat," said Big Jack. They started for the hangar, but had gotten but a few feet away when he halted.

"What's up now?" Don demanded.

"Forgot my pipe; be with you in a second," Big Jack answered, and returned to the hangar.

An instant later there was a loud and sudden masculine howl.

The others jumped in consternation, but Fred merely grinned. "Forgot it was loaded, I suppose," he said, as they retraced their steps.

"Holy Christmas," gasped the big pilot as they entered. He was tenderly rubbing his right arm and hand. "I got it first," he grinned. "Fool-like, laid my hand right on one of the wires in reaching for my pipe. I'll say you've connected up the juice, all right. Enough there to run a trolley car."

Fred, however, was not listening. He was at the doorway, looking in all directions. "I guess you didn't give it away," he said, "but you sure yelled like a stuck Dutchman."

"Try a little of your own medicine, maybe you'll yell, too," Jack retorted.

"Didn't rig it up for that purpose, thank you," said Fred, a little sarcastically. "But let me suggest that if you're really after a little electrical treatment, put your hand somewhere on the engine. That will tickle you to your toes."

"Toes don't need tickling," Big Jack responded. "I've got my pipe; let's get out."

They were on their way to the express office when two newspaper correspondents stopped them to get their views as to who had started the preceding night's fire.

"Bully story as it is," said the one who represented a large New York daily, "but a hundred times better if the guilty party should be found."

"Yes," said the other, attached to a Boston paper, "and we'd like to get your own dope on the subject."

"Guess you know about as much as we do," Jack said easily, with a guarded glance of warning at his companions. He knew that to reveal the discovery of the deliberately damaged wire, coming directly after the incendiary fire, would be a sensational story in the hands of any first-class reporter; but he had no mind to warn the enemy of how far his activities were known.

"Hear there's to be a regular all-night watch from now on," suggested the New York man.

"Yes," Jack answered. "Just as a sort of precaution, you know. It wouldn't be fair to ourselves and what we represent in this contest—and I'm speaking of each crew now, and not merely this one—to permit anything to happen that might be prevented."

"Then you do expect something more to happen?" the Bostonian persisted, the instinct of his profession catching something

in Jack's way of phrasing his last remark that instantly sharpened his news sense.

"Well—" Jack began, but Fred interrupted, with a sly wink at Andy and Don.

"We'll put it this way," he said, "if one ng happens probably two will. No," he ened, as he saw the men getting ready to question him further, "no further explanations. And don't take what I said too seriously, either."

They passed on, leaving the two newspaper men to speculate as to what Fred could have meant, if anything.

"Publicity won't hurt," said Fred, laconically. "And we didn't tell them anything."

At the express office there was a note for Jack. It was from the telegraph office, asking that he call there for a telegram.

Needless to say, they lost no time in going to the latter place.

"Wire here for me?" Jack asked. "Name's Carew."

"Yes, sir; much obliged to you for stopping in for it," the telegraph operator answered, at the same time shooting a queer look at the group as he passed over the long yellow envelope.

Jack tore it open, unfolded and glanced at

the yellow sheet within, then gave a short laugh.

"It's from the weather man at Washington," he said to the operator, "and he says we'll probably have a snowy Christmas."

"Humph!" was the only expression of the knight of the key as the four filed out of his office. "Smart Aleck!" he muttered, when the door had closed behind them and they were well out of hearing.

It was, in fact, a code telegram from the Henckel-Bradley Company, makers of the plane in which the lads were about to attempt the overseas flight.

"Guess we'd better go over to the quietude of the hut to try and dope this out," Jack suggested, and they headed immediately in that direction.

There, to facilitate matters, the work was divided between three of them. Jack, word by word, read off the almost nonsensical conglomeration of unconnected nouns and verbs, while Don, with the code key book, looked up their meanings, which he called out in low tone to Fred, who was seated at the rough table in the center of the room.

"Bannister knock hounding snowstorm Christmas joy hat euchre brains," Jack read

off the entire code telegram. "Well, I'll admit that's one to stagger the wisest operator, although on its face it seems to indicate both snow and joy next Christmas. However, let's see what it actually means. Are you ready, Don?"

"Shoot," said the other laconically, thumbing the code book impatiently.

"Bannister," Jack called off.

Don turned several pages, ran a finger down one column, came to a halt. "This looks interesting," he exclaimed. "Bannister: Take every precaution."

"Right," announced Fred, writing down the words.

"Knock," Jack read off again.

The process was repeated, and: "Knock: against," Don gave the interpretation.

"Hounding."

Don found it, and read off, while Fred wrote: "Attempt to."

"We're progressing," Jack encouraged. "And now we come to the snowstorm."

"Snowstorm?" Don repeated. "Let's see. Yes, here it is: damage plane."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Fred, reading the telegram as thus far translated. "'Take every precaution against attempt to damage plane.'"

"Yes, but we're not through yet," said Jack. "Don, tell us what Christmas means."

"Why, the season of good cheer, when you spend all your money on presents for others," Andy quickly interrupted.

"Here," Jack warned, "you're just an outsider in this. Let's hear what 'Christmas' stands for."

"Braizewell," Don announced from the book. "By George, the maker of Henryson's machine."

"Right you are," the others agreed.

"Joy," Jack next called out.

"May," Don almost instantly replied.

"Hat," Jack went on.

"Hat! Hat!" murmured Don, skimming through the pages, "Where the deuce is my hat? Ah, here she be. Hat: employ."

"Braizewell may employ," Fred read from the balance of the completed code message.

"Euchre, what's euchre?" insisted Big Jack.

"Euchre seems to be 'desperate,'" Don responded.

"And now the last," from Jack. "Brains."

"Cinch," Andy interrupted again. "What you haven't got."

"Methods," Don gave the translation, ignoring the interruption.

"Well, this is interesting anyway," said Fred, with the now completed message before him. "Here's the whole of it: 'Take every precaution against attempt to damage plane. Braizewell may employ desperate methods.'"

"Phew!" Don ejaculated. "It seems to me that Braizewell, through that scoundrel of a pilot of his, already has attempted to employ desperate methods. This holds out a mighty pleasant prospect for our peace of mind so long as we're held here, I'm thinking."

"Guess old Cap. Allerson ain't a whale of a sleuth, eh?" put in Jack.

"Looks as though he had doped Henryson out all right," Fred agreed.

"Yes, I wish when I was doing the job of sticking him into the mud I'd shoved him clear through to China," added Andy, apparently the least concerned of the four, and actually smiling in spite of the gravity of the situation that confronted them, as he recalled the ridiculous picture of the scheming pilot, Henryson, planted head-first in the mire, his feet waving frantically in the air.

"Say," he added, a sudden thought hitting him. "That fellow ought to be stuck up that way for life, with a sign hanging on him, 'Don't approach; I'm contaminated.'"

"I'm not afraid to predict that before long he'll be stuck up before the whole world as a cowardly trickster," said Jack. "He's bound to be caught at his dirty game sooner or later. He can't get away with it forever. Why, right now half the fellows suspect that he had some sort of a hand in that fire."

"Well, for the sake of our friend Captain Allerson, if the fellow is trapped I hope it's the whaling cap.—the town constabule—who lands him."

Of a sudden it seemed that the whole comparative quietude of Halifax was stirred by a series of shrieks and howls, not by one person, but in a ripping, blood-stirring, inharmonious duet.

"What in the name of sense is that!" exclaimed Jack, hurrying to the door of the hut and throwing it wide open.

"Leggo! For the love of Mike, leggo!" a strident appeal came to their ears.

"Saints of the seven seas, leggo yerself, ye fool; I'm hitched an' cain't," came a heavier but no less pained and angered tone in answer.

"Ow! Oh, Ow! !" the weaker voice continued to cry.

"Crabs of the Carribean," the gruffer one

added. "What in the name of Neptune did ye do to this thing. It ain't no flying contraption; it's alive."

There was no longer the slightest doubt about it. The cries of distress came from their hangar, and unquestionably from the town constabule, Captain Allerson, and the fire-brand pilot, Henryson.

CHAPTER V

Startling Reports

THE lads had no snowshoes to impede their progress this time, and the race to the hangar was a real contest, given zest by the anticipation of the ludicrous spectacle that was to greet them there. Slim-limbed Don won out, but he had hardly poked his head in the partially opened door when the other three were on the scene.

For a moment all four of the young men went into veritable convulsions of laughter. They roared out in gales of merriment which they could not suppress. For the time they forgot either to pity poor Captain Allerson, "town constabule," or to resent the evident malicious interference of Henryson, which evidently had brought both men into their present predicament.

Here was the despised Henryson, apparently clutching for dear life at one of the heavier braces of the plane, although in reality the trap had worked and he was caught there, unable to separate himself from the stiff

current which the lads had connected up; while Captain Allerson seemed to be in an even worse plight, his present attachment being to the engine, through which an even heavier current of electricity was flowing.

"What in Heck ye laffin' at, anyway?" the captain finally managed to bawl out, at the same time tossing his head quickly to throw off the streams of perspiration which were coursing down his wrinkled brow.

"Oh, ho! Oh, my golly," gurgled Andy, half doubled up with laughter.

"Grab it! Capshure it! Step on it! Do somethin'. Kill it!" the old whaler yelled in strident panic.

Henryson, however, who knew exactly how he had been caught—knew not only that, but that his previous schemes must have come to light, else the trap would not have been set for him—kept a pained silence, his face aflame with anger and shame.

At length Big Jack managed to put on a stern judicial appearance, although only with the greatest difficulty. He viewed the pair severely for a moment, and then, grave of visage and in the most biting tones he could control, he pretended not to understand the situation at all, and demanded an explanation.

"What does this mean, anyway?" he stormed. "I find you two in our hangar, apparently about to carry off our plane, according to your positions, and all the time yelling 'Leggo!' and 'kill it!' and a lot of other nonsense like that. 'Leggo' what? And who do you want killed?"

"Oh, don't try to be funny," Henryson, snarled. "Guess you know all about it inasmuch as you arranged it. Turn off the juice."

"The juice?" echoed Captain Allerson, still squirming in the clutches of a power he could neither see nor understand.

"If I were you I wouldn't criticize anybody, or even make suggestions," Andy Flures blurted out, in real anger, and advancing on Henryson threateningly. "You're in a pretty tough hole, and you ought to know it."

Henryson drew back suddenly as though he had been struck. For the instant he even seemed to forget the direct cause of his present predicament.

"I'll turn off the juice, all right," Big Jack announced. "But after I do we'll have a little conversation. We'd like to know some of the facts relating to this rather—er—unusual situation."

"Turn 'er off first, an' we'll conversation afterward," Captain Allerson blurted out sharply. "I've had enough o' this stuff to last a life time."

Fred severed the connection to the buried battery, and Don swung off the engine switch. The two men nearly dropped over with their sudden release, but the ex-whaling captain hadn't finished rubbing his injured hands together before he turned almost murderously upon the not completely dejected Henryson.

"Now, you," the officer of Canadian law thundered. "Yer under arrest. I dunno jest yet what the charge is, but if it's anything like what I got from this thing here it'll hold ye fer life. I'm warnin' ye not to try to get away."

"Let's get at the facts," Big Jack suggested, pointedly.

"We'll do that, and mighty quick," Captain Allerson answered, forceful if not grammatical.

The four men gathered around, and in such a way that they were between Henryson and the door, so that he could not possibly make his escape.

"It was this here way," the police force began ponderously, all the time glowering

at the discovered trickster, who refused to meet the gaze of any of the others. "I didn't know how much you suspected concernin' this mean meddler, but I had 'im marked from the very beginning as the original messenger of misery. Consequent thereto, I nachurally had an eye peeled fer him ever since that little fracas with the snowshoes when he showed up his sweet disposition.

"I ain't 'zactly pinned that fire to him yet, but I guess this is what them lawyer fellers calls circumstantial evidence of a convictin' nature.

"I sees him headin' this way a while ago, an' all the time actin' zif he didn't want to invite the general public to whatever festivities it was he was about to attend. So I thought I'd just nachurally trail along, sufficient in the rear an' out of sight so he wouldn't know what an interestin' cuss he'd become. I didn't want to arouse his suspicions, ner flatter his vanity neither.

"Well, just as I expected, he took a roundabout way, but his general direction was toward this place, and finally he reached it. Once he was inside, I wasn't long gettin' here either. I peeked in, and sure 'nough, there he was a-monkeyin' around, with no good in his twisted mind, I'll bet.

"I tiptoed in just as he was about to do somethin' to one o' them there wires. I sneaked around the side o' the plane, and was jest about to ast him sudden like what he was doin' in this here hangar, when I put my hand on somethin' thet seemed to run hot and cold both at the same time, an' be full o' needles, too; and I give a surprised little remark which causes him to jump, and touch his tender hand to thet wire, which seemed to be loaded the same way.

"The resultin' general conversation directed toward effectin' our release, I believe you heard."

"Just as I thought," said Big Jack, turning furiously toward Henryson. "Now, you pup, what were you doing here?"

"Why," Henryson stammered confusedly, in a quavering voice, "I just dropped in to see whether any of you fellows were here. I wanted to find out how you had outrigged your machine against extraordinary winds."

"Yeh, wanted to loosen it up a little, so that the first wind would cause the whole plane to collapse, eh?" demanded Andy, advancing again upon the culprit.

"What do you mean?" Henryson could hardly more than whisper.

"You know well enough what's meant," Fred interjected, while Don, his mind's eye picturing the tragedy which might and probably would have overtaken them if the treachery had not been discovered in time, stood silently by, merely clenching and unclenching his hands as an unconscious way of working off some of his pent-up anger and disgust at such inhuman and underhand work.

But before Henryson or anyone else could say anything further, Big Jack had grabbed that misguided young man by the scruff of the neck, and, with no one, not even Captain Allerson, attempting to interfere, thrust him toward that part of the plane where the cut strands of the wire had been discovered.

"I suppose you don't know anything about that little job, eh?" Jack demanded, shaking Henryson as a terrier might shake a rat.

"What do you—Why, I—I—I—"

"Oh, shut up, you cowardly idiot," interrupted Captain Allerson. "If you can't say one honest word, don't say anything at all. You're convicted already, and I guess it means a nice term of solitude fer you, too."

"Now look here," Andy broke in. "This bird's as guilty as Satan, and he knows it, and he knows we know it. However, I'm of

no mind to let one crook like him besmirch a science, a sport and a profession which decent men have kept decent and clean and far above that sort of thing.

"Captain, if you'll agree, I'll tell you what we'll do. If this fellow will get out of Halifax and clear out of Canada immediately after he has fought me, we'll let it go at that, and it'll save you spoilin' your hands on him. Will you do it?"

Captain Allerson was not the only one who turned in surprise on Andy. But nobody said anything, and finally Captain Allerson said: "Well, if I can be a witness to the scrap, and afterward see that he leaves on the first train, I'll agree. I'll admit it ain't just the thing to do under the circumstances, but then it would be a shame to let the government spend its money in prosecuting such a skunk. Are you game fer that there proposal, which is a dern sight easier than you deserve, although I suspect yer going to get the deservin' lickin' of yer life?" he demanded, turning on Henryson.

"Oh, I guess the five of you could frame me up, all right," Henryson answered sullenly, seeking some way to agree to this comparatively easy way of escape without seeming to entirely admit his guilt.

"It ain't no frame-up," snapped Constabule Allerson sharply. "You can take yer choice, providin' you do it within the next sixty seconds. You can employ a lawyer and fight the charges, if you prefer to take yer chances there."

"Oh, I'm not afraid to fight," Henryson retorted, seeing the way opening for him to take that alternative. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Without disputing any of the points further I'll accept this challenge, with the idea that if I win I stay and there's nothing more said. If I'm licked I'll leave."

"Well, you brazen pup!" ejaculated Captain Allerson.

"Agreeable to me," Andy retorted, "for it amounts to the same thing after all. You're going to be licked, and licked so you won't forget it for some years to come; and then you're going to sneak out of here as rapidly and as quietly as you can. You can make your own explanations to the other crews if you want to. We won't discuss the matter after you're gone."

"Well, where's this here struggle to take place?" demanded the former whaling captain, much more favorably disposed to this method of solving the difficulty than by

merely placing the meddling pilot under arrest.

"Why not here?" asked Don. "We'll roll the machine out, then close the door and start proceedings."

"Guess that's best, providing no one else finds out what's going on," Captain Allerson agreed. "But I'm going to be referee of this match, and there ain't going to be any funny work, either." He shot another vicious look at Henryson.

While Big Jack remained within to see that the captured pilot did not escape the consequences of his misdeeds, the other three young men rolled the machine out, left it standing in front of the hangar, as several other machines were then before other hangars at some distance away, and then returned, locking the door behind them.

"Inasmuch as this is to be a fight, and not a boxing exhibition," said Andy, "I'd suggest that there be no rounds, and that the only rules to be the rules of fair play—not to hit below the belt."

"That's settled as soon as sed," declared Captain Allerson with finality.

Both combatants stripped off their collars, neckties and shirts, and in two minutes stood

before each other, ready for the fray. Big Jack surveyed them appraisingly. So did all the others. No doubt about it, both were magnificent specimens of masculine physique. Andy was the shorter by perhaps an inch and a half, and to the same extent had the disadvantage in reach; but as offsetting that he had a greater depth of chest and breadth of shoulder, was undoubtedly the stronger and therefore the harder hitter, and in addition was as quick as a tiger on his feet.

Above all, Jack concluded as he compared them, Andy had the great additional psychological advantage of being in the right, while Henryson, no matter how callous his conscience might be, could not evade the knowledge that he was so entirely in the wrong as to be mighty close to being within the criminal class.

"Odds on Andy," Big Jack murmured to himself as the men squared off before each other, Captain Allerson just outside of the large ring which he had marked off with the toe of his heavy boot.

"Are you ready?" Captain Allerson demanded, suppressing his own excitement with some difficulty.

The men nodded, but neither uttered a sound, so intent was each in measuring and watching the other.

"Then go to it," Captain Allerson announced, and involuntarily stepped back a couple of paces as the two men began sparring around for an opening. In another instant it became apparent that this was to be no child's play. It was the cruelest sort of a fight that can be had—with bare knuckles.

Biff! Henryson landed the first blow, but only a glancing one, across Andy's shoulder. It seemed to have needed that and only that to touch off the spark of fury in the usually good-natured Andy Flures.

Like a whirlwind he came at his antagonist, his arms working like irresistible pistons, and so rapidly that even the onlookers could hardly count the blows. They landed on Henryson's face, head, body and stomach. But he was no weakling, nor was Andy endowed with the stamina to keep up such a ferocious attack indefinitely. If nothing else, neither he nor any other man had the lung power to keep up the breath necessary for such an onslaught.

Realizing that he might be wearing himself down too early in the struggle, Andy slowed up. Henryson, mistaking this for a weakening, and being somewhat fresher, though badly battered, by having been entirely on the

defensive, tried to rush. Andy deftly stepped aside, and Henryson staggered to the opposite side of the ring before he regained his balance.

As he did so Andy came at him again. The brief respite seemed to have given him renewed strength and determination. He landed a blow on Henryson's chest with his left, and almost at the same instant broke down the latter's defense and landed on his nose with his right.

The jolt of the two terrific impacts, and the spurt of blood which followed the second, sent Henryson into a blind and impotent rage. He attempted Andy's rushing tactics and came to an abrupt halt on a right hand jab that sent him reeling out of the ring.

"Get back there and fight, you yellow pup," growled Captain Allerson, at the same time giving the badly battered Henryson a vicious shove.

Andy, however, did what his adversary never in the world would have done. Instead of putting him out of his misery then and there, he waited, with hands down, until Henryson had again put up his fists in defense. They came together with another rush and whirled about the hangar like two savages in a wild dervish.

"Break that clinch," ordered the erstwhile sailor of the northern seas, bringing to bear the little knowledge he had gained from newspaper sporting pages, and at the same time rushing in to perform the duties of referee.

Whether purposely or by accident, Henryson at just that instant reached forward with a quick short jolt. It caught Captain Allerson a clout under the chin.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed the amateur referee, jumping back in pained surprise.

But the men separated, and the fight was on again with such earnestness and bitterness that no one, not even Captain Allerson himself, paid further attention to this accident.

Henryson landed a stiff jolt to Andy's short ribs which elicited a deep grunt. His adversary again made a fatal mistake. He interpreted it as the first signs of a weakening. He didn't know Andy.

That young man simply came back like lightning. Both men were breathing heavily by now, and Henryson was almost covered with blood, while he had been unable to inflict a single cut or serious bruise on his wary opponent, who seemed to be in half a dozen parts of the ring almost simultaneously.

"Get at 'im," Don muttered, hardly aware

that he had given expression to his thoughts or feelings. But Andy heard, and it seemed as if it had required only this urge, this expression of confidence from his friend, to put him into what was to be the grand finale of the fight.

He swung viciously with his left and caught the unprepared Henryson with terrific force just above the heart. Before Henryson could even recover his balance, Andy let go with his right. It landed with the power of a motor truck behind it. It caught Henryson on that fatal spot, the point of the jaw, and lifted him clear of the ground. He staggered for an instant and then dropped in an unconscious, and for the moment a seemingly lifeless, heap. Andy looked at him for only a second, and then dropped his clenched hands. He, as well as the others, knew that the blow had been struck which had ended the fight. Henryson was *out*.

Captain Allerson glanced at the defeated pilot, and then walked over to Andy.

"Young man," he said. " I'm not supposed to watch fights without interferin'. I want to congratulate you upon makin' a most excellent job of this one."

Henryson stirred and muttered something

incoherent. He was still only half conscious. Don stepped outside the hangar for a moment and returned with a basin of water.

"For him to wash up with, so he won't be delayed in getting out of town," he said laconically, to no one in particular.

"Oh, I'll escort him, all right. And I'll examine his ticket and have a word with the conductor, too, before he starts," Captain Allerson promised.

Henryson moved again, and this time opened his eyes.

"Get up, wash your face and put your clothes on," the minion of the law ordered brusquely. "You couldn't win your chance to stay here, even when you were given an opportunity to fight for it. Come on; hustle. We don't want you contaminatin' the atmosphere around here any longer."

Slowly Henryson seemed to regather his wits and to realize what had happened to him. He glanced at his person and involuntarily shuddered as he saw that he was literally covered with blood. One eye was nearly closed, and his nose was swollen to nearly twice its normal size.

He arose stiffly, but without a word.

"There's only one thing I want to say to

you before you go," said Big Jack, standing squarely in front of him. "You got your licking here today; you got it fair and square; you're getting off mighty easy at that. If I ever hear of your being in aviation again, or if I ever catch you around a hangar or an aviation field, I'll instantly have you arrested and reveal all the facts of what has happened here in the last few days. Do I make that clear?"

Henryson nodded sullenly, but his features had been so distorted that none of the men could tell whether he was sneering or not.

At last clothed, and his general appearance made as presentable as possible, Henryson briefly signified that there was nothing to keep him there longer.

"We've just time to catch a train that don't make a stop until it gets a long way from here," Captain Allerson announced. "Come on, stir yourself. And if you try to get away I'll shoot you. As a matter o' fact, I wouldn't be disappointed at havin' the chance."

The odd pair strode out of the hangar and toward the railroad station. The four youths, watching them, saw several members of other crews at different points along the

route hesitate, regard the two curiously, seem on the verge of saying something, and then hold their silence as the two passed hurriedly on.

"Well, that being over with, I think I'll go get some arnica for my wrists and knuckles," Andy announced. "I haven't had such violent exercise since I came up with a fresh Fritz in the Argonne."

"Want me to go for you?" asked Fred. "I'd be glad to. Somebody might ask you a lot of questions, you know."

"All right," Andy agreed. "Thanks."

"And we'll replace this brace wire and test out the others while you're gone," Jack supplemented. Then, turning to Andy, "You'd better sit around and rest for awhile It was pretty strenuous."

Fred departed, and the other two set themselves to the task of going over the entire plane. The drug store was a considerable distance away, and they had about completed their work when Fred hove into sight on a dogtrot. They saw him half shout something to a couple of other men as he passed, and they noted too that in so doing he seemed to refer to a folded newspaper which he gripped tightly in one hand.

He was almost breathless when he arrived. But he managed to blurt out enough to make Big Jack hastily grab the paper.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed as the big headlines caught his eye. He read them aloud.

No need to recite them in detail here. They were pointedly to the effect that the Peace Conference had struck a serious snag; that Japan was suspicious; her envoys obdurate; that a virtual ultimatum had been pronounced, and in such a way as to threaten a new war worse even than that which had just ended.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Don ejaculated, more to himself than anyone else.

"Looks as though it might stop the flight, even if it doesn't develop into anything worse," said Andy, who immediately had forgotten his painful knuckles.

Big Jack was still reading the balance of the story, which was under a London date line. There was no question but that a very serious situation existed. Within an hour all Halifax was so agog with it that no one seemed to miss Henryson, or to mention it if he did.

Even Captain Allerson gave way to new sensations as he measured the possibilities of

a new war, and he merely reported briefly that Henryson had been "deported," and with instructions to the conductor not to let him off the train within the next two hundred miles.

That night half a dozen other would-be Transatlantic contestants dropped into the hut which had come to be known as "Big Jack's." There were lengthy discussions and all sorts of predictions, but all they could do was to await the morning papers, which might contain further and more definite news.

CHAPTER VI

New War Clouds

BUT if a clearing of the international political atmosphere was hoped for or expected in Halifax the following morning, the disappointment there was as sad and deep as it was in a dozen national capitals, all the chancellories of Europe, and in the State Department at Washington. Deep depression seemed to prevail everywhere, and indeed not without good reason.

The two newspapers of Halifax gave little additional news to that of the day before, but even this was of the most discouraging nature. It began to look, in fact, as though the representatives of the Japanese government had been instructed to seek a quarrel.

It turned out later that that was not at all the case, but who could discern the real motives behind the demands of that critical time?

Crowds hung about the local newspaper bulletin boards, but throughout the day they added little to the meagre enough news that had been given early in the morning.

Shortly before noon Jack received another code message from the makers of their machine, and with this the young men eagerly hurried to their hut, where they shut and locked themselves in, to avoid interruption during the process of deciphering, which, under the circumstances, was delayed rather than hastened by their own natural impatience.

But if the message, when finally translated, foreboded serious difficulties ahead, it also bore the seeds of an almost unbounded enthusiasm upon the part of the four young men.

"Consider yourselves in Government service," the message read, "and prepare for eventualities."

Of course, if this seemed to hold some indefinite sort of promise of more adventure, it also was filled with mystery, and might, after all, be entirely meaningless so far as concerned our four young friends, virtually for the time being chained in Halifax.

"What the deuce do you suppose it means, anyway?" asked Fred, when they had for the tenth time tried at further diagnosis of the baffling message.

"Guess about the only thing we can do under the circumstances is to sit pat and wait

for further developments or additional instructions," said Big Jack.

"Yes," added Don, "and under those same aforementioned circumstances that's about the most tedious and difficult thing in the world to do."

"Well, admitting all that, what are you going to do about it?" asked Andy, by this time utterly oblivious to a pair of swollen hands which still showed clear evidences of the battle of the day before.

"Under the said circumstances, nothing; that's what we'll all do for the present," Fred answered gloomily.

"Righto! And it won't keep us very busy, either," assented Andy, who was of a nature which refused to be suppressed.

"Fine weather, too, just by way of cheering humanity up," suggested Big Jack, as he gazed morosely out of the window. It was cloudy to the point of threatening more rain, which, of course, under the most favorable circumstances otherwise, would only mean further inevitable delays in any attempt at the across-sea flight.

"Oh, what's the use of growling? Let's have a game of cribbage," Andy the cheerful suggested.

"You three can," Fred answered, "but as for me, I'm going down to the station to wait for the outside newspapers to come in. I'm the original little handy guy when it comes to bringing home the news. I'll see what I can do this afternoon."

And while the other three, for the want of anything better to do, sat down to the game, Fred wandered off toward the station, knowing that fully half an hour more must elapse before the train would be in.

That interval was not to be put in entirely without profit, however, for Fred was to learn the natural sequence of the enforced departure of the treacherous pilot, Henryson. He got it from another member of Henryson's crew, who, either by message from the former, or by some intuition, seemed to know what had happened. This fellow merely informed Fred that Braizewell had decided not to enter his machine or crew in the Transatlantic flight.

A lot of things were becoming apparent since first discovery was made of Henryson's treachery, and not the least among them was the fact that Braizewell, being of that stamp, did not care to match his product against others in any honest competition.

Fred digested the statement about Braizewell's withdrawal without comment. What was the use of discussion with a man who was probably familiar with, and subscribed to, all of Braizewell's and Henryson's carefully cooked-up but eventually unsuccessful perfidies? Fred merely heard the bit of gossip and passed on. He wasn't interested in either Braizewell or Henryson, now that neither was in any respect a factor in the projected America-to-Europe flight. He just loafed around the station until the train came puffing in, and from the baggage car a bundle of papers were tossed to the platform; and then his spirits awakened again and he was the first to get one from the news man.

His spirits awakened, did we say? One glance at the front page and he flopped into one of the rough station seats to read half a column before he remembered his equally curious companions back at the hut, who were awaiting his arrival with the latest news.

And it was news. Conditions were reaching a crisis in the Peace Conference! Not that conditions hadn't approached other crises there before; but they had been concerning minor matters as compared with the present difficulties.

In a way it concerned the celebrated "open door" policy as regards China, which the illustrious John Hay had established years before when Secretary of State of the United States. It dealt with the disposition of Shantung and Chinese provinces which Japan wanted; and it related intimately to Japanese inquiries as to American guarantees to China, and American loans floated in behalf of that nation which today typifies the oldest and the slowest of civilizations.

But the crux of the whole situation lay in the Japanese demand to see the important documents. Not that her envoys doubted the veracity of other delegations to the Conference or the authenticity of reports and records which were shown. Oh, no; of course not! Time and again this was politely and diplomatically reaffirmed. There wasn't any doubt, only—well, Japanese statesmen would like to see the documents and treaties; in fact, insisted upon it.

At any other time the representatives of the United States might have adopted different tactics. But here were involved more issues than one; more governments than two; more nations than half a dozen.

And there seemed to be a prevailing feeling

in the Peace Conference that, aside from the rather roughly insistent way in which she was going about it, Japan was within her rights in demanding to see and to know exactly what she was subscribing or binding herself to, especially since the President of the United States had himself, during the war, laid down the principle of "open covenants, openly arrived at."

Fred read enough of the article to give him an intelligent idea of the whole delicate situation, and then hurried off to the hut and his three waiting friends.

They received the news with mingled feelings. There was the one of natural resentment at any delegation or government using pressure approaching force in dealing with the United States. There was that of speculation as to how it would end, and when. There was the uppermost question of all: What effect would this suddenly developed and new international situation have upon the proposed Transatlantic flights?

Big Jack strolled over again to the window to gaze out at the muddied atmosphere of Halifax. From every viewpoint and everywhere it seemed to be a gloomy outlook. Men fresh from war are wearied of it and have

no desire for a new outbreak of that international pestilence. The glamor of it has gone; while they will of course fight if need be, they prefer the arts and the comforts of peace. They have learned to appreciate them a great deal more than they ever did before. Certainly no one in this group wanted to see any renewal of blood-spilling conflict.

"Well," said Big Jack finally, turning from the window and addressing the other three who had been debating the problem among themselves, "the thing resolves itself into this: apparently the American delegation has yielded to the pressure of unanimous opinion, or nearly unanimous opinion, in the Conference. But so far as I can grasp from reading this latest article, Japan is attempting to demand to see something within a period almost impossible for it to be produced at the Peace Conference to be seen. That's the ugly part of it all. It looks like any pretext for balking—if not worse."

"What I can't understand," said Don, "is the reason for her insistence and hurry."

"If we were familiar with the tricks and schemes of international dealings and diplomacy, perhaps all that might be clear," Andy answered. "We don't know, of course, what

Japan has in mind, or what her envoys may have been led to believe."

"True," said Jack, "and after all, I guess that's a matter which safely can be left with the American delegation, headed by our President. But it does look like a ticklish situation."

"The head-lines here seem to state it," Fred added. "They're brief but to the point: 'Japan Demands Immediate Presentation of Important Treaties.'"

"Yes, under veiled threats of withdrawing from the Peace Conference," Don supplemented. "I guess all this is sad news to the Huns, eh?"

"There's probably German trickery back of the situation somewhere," assented Jack.

"Which doesn't settle the question of who's going to fry the steak and potatoes for supper," interjected Andy. "Only, if it's Fred, for the love of Mike will he please see that the frying process reaches the in'ards of the steak."

Accepting the reminder that it was near dinner time, and that it was, indeed, his day as cook, but utterly ignoring the suggestion that he didn't cook things through, Fred arose to prepare the meal, and the useless consultation broke up with Don starting to the store for lard, butter and other necessities, and Big Jack accepting the assignment of bringing in the wood.

CHAPTER VII

Summoned to Washington

COULD our friends have been in Washington early the following day and in the confidence of the inner circles of the Government, their spirits might have been far above what they were.

In the first place, the State Department had received word during the night, from no less an authority than the President himself, that the questioned documents in which Japan had shown such an interest were to be sent to France at the earliest possible moment, by the quickest and most expeditious way, in the care of the most trustworthy messengers to be found.

That of itself was a large order, and one likely to cause more than ordinary perturbation in the State Department; but when a Cabinet meeting was called and held a little later, and those present, knowing the seriousness of the situation as no outsider could know it, decided that the mission should be accomplished in record time, and that inci-

dentally in so doing America would set a pace for the world by sending the documents over by aeroplane, then among the staid and conservative old-school statesmen of the service there was a great wagging of heads, whisperings and forebodings.

Nevertheless that decision was arrived at, and right speedily, too. The question then remained, who was to be trusted with the double responsibility of getting a plane across the Atlantic, and of carrying the documents of world import?

The head of the Government's aero service was called into the secret conference, and to him the decision was revealed. The men selected must be of the finest caliber in ability, trustworthiness and capacity to hold their own counsel, and if necessary depend upon their own resources in any emergency which might arise. Whom could he recommend?

The sharp-visaged, snappy-eyed, gray-haired head of the air service listened in silence until the whole plan was outlined and the great question put to him. Could he supply such men? Such an aero crew? Men who could be trusted not only to get to Europe, but to get there with the documents?

Very calmly, as though answering an in-

quiry of everyday routine, the official who suddenly and for the moment had become the most important man in the United States, replied that he had such men.

"And who are they?" demanded the Assistant Secretary of State, who, after all, would be called upon to bear the greatest part of the burden if any mishap occurred.

"Americans," snapped the aero service head, who, for his own reasons held no very friendly feelings toward this temporary chief of another and even more important governmental department.

"Yes, yes," replied the Secretary of War, showing some impatience. "But who are they? Where are they?"

"They are now in Halifax, waiting for opportune conditions to make the Transatlantic flight. Of course you all know their names."

"Halifax? Halifax?" snorted the Assistant Secretary of State. "But, Great Scott, man, we want men who are here—at least in the United States—to start upon this trip at the earliest possible moment."

"Well, you can't start an unprecedented trip of this sort without preparation, and you can't start it at any old hour, or from any old

point along the coast," retorted the air service man with equal spirit.

"Are they prepared for such a trip—for such an important mission, now?" asked the Secretary of the Navy.

"They are prepared for such a trip, as well as any crew could be, and they are as capable, as courageous and as trustworthy as anyone could ask," was the response, "but of course, they did not contemplate a diplomatic mission at the same time. However, there is no reason why, if they are going across by plane, they should not carry documents, important or otherwise, with them."

"But these documents are such that if they once start with them they *must* get across," interrupted the Assistant Secretary of State testily.

"I see," remarked the air service man with fine sarcasm. "Wind, sea, fate, predestination and everything else be hanged. They've just got to suspend all elements for the time being and get across. That's perfectly clear."

The Assistant Secretary of State sputtered for a moment and got purple with rage. But before he could explode into language more violent than diplomatic, the Secretary of War intervened.

"How long would it take that crew to come from Halifax to Washington?" he asked.

"By plane?"

"Yes."

"If they were given orders by telegraph now, and barring mishap, they could be on hand here tomorrow morning easily."

"Very well then," said the Secretary of State, turning to address his colleagues of the Cabinet, "I suggest that we ask General Bronson to issue such instructions by wire or wireless to these young men at once, so that they may personally receive their instructions here tomorrow morning."

"Yes, but—" the Assistant Secretary of State, still scowling in the direction of General Bronson, started to say something; but inasmuch as it sounded like a remonstrance, and as his innate conservatism and antipathy to things modern were well known, he was interrupted by the Secretary of the Navy.

"It is the only feasible thing to do," he said. "Therefore it ought to be done at once."

"Very well, then," answered the Assistant Secretary of State reluctantly, while the others present agreed without further question or qualification.

"My understanding is, then," said General Bronson, rising and making ready to depart to carry out his share of the problem, "that I am at once to get in touch with the members of this crew, to have them come here by plane, and if possible be on hand by tomorrow morning."

"Correct, sir," responded the Secretary of War. "You probably will instruct them to land on the field over near Fort Meyer?"

"Yes, sir," responded General Bronson, and, saluting in true military style, left the room.

Thus it was, although the four young men in far-off Halifax could not know the preliminaries which had led up to it, that before 11 o'clock that morning a code message that was to be of world importance went sizzling through the air from one powerful wireless station to another, finally to be relayed by wire to the point outside Halifax proper, where the flying field and hangars marked the point from which the first Transatlantic aeroplane flight was to be attempted.

When they had received and translated it, the young men stood for a full minute looking at each other—as Big Jack explained it afterward, entirely flabbergasted.

"Come to Washington immediately by

plane," the wireless read. "Land Potomac below city. Secrecy important."

And they didn't know that as he wrote this message General Bronson had had his own little chuckle at the expense of the Secretary of War, who seemingly knew so little about hydro-aeroplanes as to suggest that they land at Fort Meyer.

"Shoemaker should stick to his last," the head of the air service had muttered into his mustache as he penned the summons.

Among the four men in Halifax, however, there was almost uncontrollable excitement and anticipation. They had put two and two together, and true to the law of mathematics it had made four. In other words, they were convinced that their summons to the national capital was directly connected with the international situation.

Everything pertaining to their plane had been ready even for an over-sea attempt since the careful inspection which had followed the capture of Henryson in the hangar. They hurried there after reading the summons, to add the final details before their flight to the capital. This done, they ran the big bird-like machine out on its skids and down to the surface of the water. In less than an hour they were ready for the start.

"Trial on a day like this?" asked one pilot who sauntered up curiously.

"Not exactly a try-out," Big Jack replied, instantly realizing that here was a chance to lull suspicion and still idle gossip which otherwise would be awakened by their strange trip and stranger disappearance. "We're going to put her to some real preliminary tests in a long flight over land. Of course, with the pontoons on, instead of wheels, we'll hug the coast line, so as to be able to land quickly if necessary; but we don't anticipate any trouble, although we may make it a two-days' trip."

"H'm," the other man responded, looking at them queerly, as though he thought they were joking and expected them to laugh.

"See you in a day or two," Andy sang out as he opened the throttle. The engine began to bang out its challenging explosions and the propellers started to whirl.

"So long," the other pilot shouted, apparently still dubious, as Jack swung the plane round gently and she started to skim the water, gathering speed every second in preparation for taking the air.

In fifteen minutes they were completely lost to the view of those who had hastily run

to the shore line when the powerful chug-chug of the giant motor had first rent the air. For the double purpose, however, of saving time and giving their disturbed colleagues every assurance that they were not in fact making the Transatlantic attempt, they headed due south, and were still keeping that direction when they disappeared from sight.

An hour later Fred opened up the wireless and finally got the Halifax station.

"Headed south, putting plane through tests," he tapped off by radio. "May be gone day or two."

He might have added, but didn't, "On important government business."

CHAPTER VIII

"Deliver These at Paris"

ASK anyone who knows, and he will tell you that there is nothing to compare to the zest of the aerial flight. Those contemplating it for the first time view it with mixed feelings of trepidation and anticipation, but once in flight there is only unbounded exhilaration. The experience is like that of throwing off shackles which have bound one to a narrow earthly existence; mere human cares and worries are for the time at least forgotten, and one feels the freedom of the birds and glows with the very pleasure of it. Fears which beset the preliminaries are forgotten; the imagination is awakened with new ambitions; life seems to hold forth previously unthought-of possibilities. And the real joy of it all is that the aerial flight never loses its thrill, never fails in these and new sensations.

Add to this the mystery contained in their unexpected summons to Washington, and the natural pride stirred by the anticipation of

being called upon for some important service, and you have some realization of the feelings which animated these four young men as, at a cruising speed of ninety miles an hour, they continued their voyage southward, a mile and a half in the air, two miles out to sea from the shore line, looking like a giant eagle in the sky to those who discovered or discerned them at all.

As for personal comfort, they were as free from the driving wind as though they had been riding in a limousine automobile, for indeed this was a limousine airship, thoroughly enclosed as concerned the Nacelle, or cockpit and fusilage, which contained the crew and access to every part of the engine, radio, etc.

Occasionally Fred would catch snatches of wireless messages, but mostly they were of a commercial and therefore uninteresting character.

It was about midnight when they came within that sky glow which informed them that they were approaching the metropolis of America—New York.

"Think of the damage a bomber could do, and the consternation it could raise down there," said Don. "Let's circle around two

or three times, just for the fun of it. We've got plenty of time now."

And they did. Cutting inland, they crossed almost directly over the heart of the city, continued over the North River and above Hoboken, swung down and around Newark, out over the bay and then upward toward the big city again, as though actually bent upon a mission of mischief.

Again they repeated this, and then swerved out over Brooklyn and above the open sea again.

A little more than an hour elapsed and they were above Philadelphia. It lay like a great black splotch on the ground, the meagre moonlight playing on the Delaware in a way to make it look like a great thread of silver. Only a winding line indicated where the Schuylkill cut the city in two, but where it joined the Delaware the latter began to widen, and from the height of the plane they could see far below to where the river became a bay.

Ships dotted it here and there like little spiders resting on a pool. Nothing moved. It was like a fairy visit to another and a dead world.

The bay itself was so smooth that they

decided to drop there for a few minutes, open their thermos bottles of coffee, which was still hot, eat a couple of sandwiches at leisure, and then continue the trip. Finally finding a spot so remote from any ship that it was unlikely that their descent would be discovered, and thereby perhaps raise a furore of excitement and speculation as to who they were and what they were doing there at that queer time, they made their landing with such ease as hardly to cause a splash as they settled on the surface of the water.

The inner man satisfied, they prepared for the continuance of their trip. There was a swift inspection of every part of the plane, and in another ten minutes they were again under way, the firing of the engines sounding like a miniature artillery bombardment on the stillness of the night.

As they rose with the speed and strength and sureness of a giant eagle, they left the city of William Penn far behind, noted the spot which indicated Lewes, Delaware, as it seemed to flit swiftly beneath them on the flank of the lower bay, then passed Cape May and were out over the open sea again. The moon was now disappearing and it devolved upon Don Harlan, the navigator of the crew,

by chart and compass and air-speed indicator (whose information, by the way, is always problematical, for reasons which will be explained in a moment), to guide them safely to their destination.

Now as to one of the present grave difficulties with which the navigators of the air have to contend, especially when flying over bodies of water, which, unlike flights over the ground, give no "landmarks" by which position may be determined.

If there is, let us say, no wind whatever blowing, either with or against the direction of the plane, the air-speed indicator will register one hundred miles per hour speed when the plane is traveling at that rate. But let the plane, with its engines running at the same power, get into the teeth of a seventy-five-mile-an-hour gale, and with a seventy-five mile push back to a hundred mile an hour forward push of the engines, the speed-indicator will still register one hundred miles per hour (that is, air-speed), although the plane will actually be traveling a distance of only twenty-five miles per hour with relation to the ground.

In other words, it is the principle of air pressure, and if there is no adverse air pres-

sure, the indicator will show the exact speed of the plane. But the moment the plane is either augmented or retarded by favorable or unfavorable winds, the air-speed indicator becomes a very unreliable instrument for showing distances traveled: it practically only records the speed of the air pushed past the plane. It is like running at ten miles an hour with a pin-wheel in the hand on a perfectly calm day, and getting a certain velocity of revolutions of the wheel per minute. On another day one might stand still with the pin-wheel and permit the rush of a high velocity of wind to twirl it round with the same speed.

And here is a hint to our youthful readers who are interested in mathematics and things mechanical: Sometime somebody is going to invent an instrument which will record an aeroplane's actual speed with relation to the distance covered above the ground; in other words, which will actually show a speed of only twenty-five miles an hour when a hundred-mile-an-hour engine speed is being reduced to twenty-five by a head-on seventy-five-mile-an-hour gale; and the one who succeeds with that invention not only will make for himself a fortune, but then may

turn his attention to the devising of another instrument, equally important, which will show how far a side wind is driving a plane out of its course.

But Don Harlan had trained long and studiously to combat and conquer just such difficulties, and like the seasoned sailor who can look at a clear sky and seem to smell a storm brewing, or a squall coming, he had learned, by some intuition which he could not even attempt to explain, to estimate with almost miraculous accuracy to just what extent the wind was retarding them or blowing them off their course.

He was bending over his charts now, marking off their course, registering the slight wind deviation, when an exclamation from Fred, who sat at all times with the radio earpieces on, attracted the attention of all. With Big Jack and Andy Flures, the pilots, it was indicated merely by the briefest turning of the head, but Don stopped short in his work to watch Fred jotting down a message that was coming mysteriously out of the night.

"Official dispatch," he announced a moment later.

"Follow previous instructions. One re-

main with plane, other three at my office nine if possible. Repeat."

It was signed by Bronson, head of the air service.

Fred threw on the switch of the radio and opened up with the code call. Almost immediately he got a response. He repeated the message, and then gave their approximate location as Don had plotted it out.

There was a considerable delay, during which they concluded that the dispatch was being telephoned to General Bronson, and then the answer came, "Good work," and out of the silence of the night there was recorded no more.

The balance of their journey was without incident, but every turn of the propeller, every explosion within the cylinders, it might be said, gave them renewed confidence that when they essayed the ocean flight, if that should be their privilege or their mission, they would do so with a machine as near to perfection as modern engineering could make it.

It was hardly dawn when they settled on the surface of the Potomac, and, with the time still left them made a cursory overhauling of their engine in search of any weaknesses or

defects. They found none. It was as though the long trip from Halifax to Washington had been merely a warming-up, preliminary to some real test of staunch durability.

It was immediately and amicably decided that Fred, because of his knowledge of the wireless, which might catch some message relating to their disappearance from Halifax and thus tell them what was being speculated about them, should remain with the plane, while the other three changed into the presentable "cits," or civilian clothes, they had brought with them, and carry out the balance of the instructions concerning meeting General Bronson at nine o'clock at his office.

We know what they were to be told, and it did not take General Bronson, a man noted for his brevity, long to impart to them the fact that they were to undertake a mission which, considered in all its phases, was absolutely without precedent.

"We will now go and meet the members of the Cabinet," he said.

In fifteen minutes they were in the presence of the men who had directed the various services of the Government during the greatest war in the world's history. They were introduced, most critically looked over, and asked

a few, but a very few, questions. Then the Assistant Secretary of State gave them their final instructions.

"You understand thoroughly the importance of these papers?" he asked.

"Absolutely, sir," Big Jack replied, and the other two nodded affirmatively.

"Very well, then," the Assistant Secretary of State replied. "The continued peace of the world may hinge upon your success. There must be no failure. You will guard these papers with your lives. I hand them to you in the presence of the members of the Cabinet. *Deliver these at Paris.*"

CHAPTER IX

Off to Europe

ACCUSTOMED as they were to excitement and thrills, it was with an exuberance which they could not entirely submerge or control that Big Jack, Don and Andy Flures repeated their instructions to Fred Bentner.

"We return at once to Halifax," Jack continued, "replenish oil and petrol, mount a machine gun which already has been ordered there for us by wireless, and which will be secretly put into the hangar, so that no one will begin gossiping, and then we're off."

"Weather permitting, of course," suggested Fred.

"The international crisis is not being affected by the weather," Jack answered. "Only an impossible brand will prevent our getting away just as soon as we are ready. This is not to be a test flight under the most favorable conditions, but under whatever weather happens to prevail, once we get under way."

"Whew!" ejaculated Fred. "This isn't to be any play or sporting contest."

"It most certainly is not," said Andy. "And it's very likely to develop into one of the toughest jobs we ever tackled, for more reasons than one."

"Relate them," Fred urged.

"Well," Andy continued, "why, for instance, the machine gun? These fellows in Washington are not given to useless delays or to heroics. Their attitude was mighty serious, and although they didn't mention it, I grasped that there might be interests which, if they knew we had these documents, might go a mighty long way to come into possession of them, or at least prevent their being presented at the Peace Conference in time to accomplish their purpose."

"You're right," said Don, seeming to catch the full significance of their possible difficulties for the first time. "By golly, I never gave that a thought."

"Well, all of us may before we're over," said Andy.

But by now they were ready for their return flight to Halifax, from which it was necessary that they make their start, though for new reasons developed in the foregoing

conversation, all of them wished that it might be possible to begin their flight from another and less prominent place.

Back over almost the identical route they had traveled on their journey to the capital, they flew the return trip, passing Philadelphia and New York by daylight, however, at such a tremendous height that they were practically lost to view, coming along the rugged coast of lower New England as darkness began to close in on them.

Dense clouds entirely obscured the moon, and of necessity they reduced speed to "feel their way" against the strong east wind which tended to drive them inland.

"It looks bad for a start tomorrow," Jack said, as he glanced at the barometer which showed a downward tendency.

"That'll change as we get further north, if I'm not mistaken," said Don, casting a keen glance downward. "What's the altimeter show?"

"We're up about 2300," Andy answered, reading the register of their height.

Don again measured the angle between due north, as indicated by the compass, and their line of direction as shown by the longitudinal line of the plane. It showed that uncon-

sciously in the dense blackness of the night they were again bearing inland.

A few brief words from the navigator, and there was a slight increase of speed, accompanied by a bank and outward turn, and then, as the mist on the glass-encased nacelle showed they were on the cloud line, a drop of a couple of hundred feet.

As they passed the rugged coast of Maine they could hear great waves pounding on the rocky shore, but it came up to them only dimly against the throbbing of their engines and the soothing song of the resistless propellers.

Dawn found them above a coast line which none of them knew. It was bleak and barren, with no evidences of population upon it.

"Just as I reckoned," said Don, easily. "The wind got behind us stronger than we knew. We've more than covered our destination. We're heading for Labrador, and, at this rate, the North Pole."

The navigator was right. They banked and turned, and in three hours came within sight of welcome Halifax.

They made an easy descent and rolled their machine onto the portable skids to take it into the hangar.

But so easily and logically had Big Jack explained their apparent purpose in being away that there was nothing more than an ordinary curiosity about them on their return.

"Took it easy," Andy explained to one pilot who started inquiries. And then, as though in reality he was trying to hide some defects which had developed: "We stopped two or three times, of course, to look her over, or we would have been back sooner."

The other pilot tried to hide a smile. Andy had succeeded beyond measure. Before noon they heard whisperings of the weaknesses their plane had developed while out.

But while this speculation was running the gamut of the aero field, the four youths were working with all the speed they knew how to expend, to get the machine gun mounted, store aboard the necessary fuel and oil for the long and hazardous trip, stock up with two days' provisions, and get their rounds of ammunition and other incidentals in place.

It was two o'clock that afternoon when Big Jack, with a final critical survey, announced everything complete.

Don went to the door and glanced out. There were not more than four or five persons in sight anywhere, and none of them near.

It was instantly decided that the propitious moment was at hand. The four of them got behind the big plane, mounted upon its portable skids, and threw their weight against the well-balanced craft. But at that it was about all they could do to get it started, for in addition to its own weight, the plane carried four and a half tons of petrol, oil, ammunition, machine gun and rations.

Once started, however, the momentum made the job a comparatively easy one. Glancing sideways, they could see that one or two men had stopped at a distance to watch them. Apparently satisfied, however, that at most it was to be nothing more than another trial spin, they soon passed on.

The giant bird-like machine was now floating on her own pontoons on the surface of the none-too-smooth water.

"Ready?" asked Jack, curtly.

"All set," the quick answer came back.

"Then," said Big Jack, in steady measured tones, as he grasped the throttle which flyers know as the "joy stick", "we're off."

The engines banged, the propellers whirled, the stately craft glided down the waters with rapidly increasing speed, and in a few moments rose majestically into the air.

Like a bird loosed from its cage, it swerved about in an ever-widening circle, and then, to the manner of a homing pigeon picking up the scent, it turned its nose toward Europe and soon was lost to sight.

In the exhilaration of the "hop-off" the men had forgotten the difficulties that might lie ahead.

Could they have looked backward through a telescope as powerful as the one which was trained upon them they would have seen four strangers standing intently in the doorway of that which had been Henryson's hangar, while within three mechanics worked furiously while two other men with equal haste were putting aboard supplies almost identical with those on the plane which already was under way.

And could they have diagnosed this activity they would have known that Germany had had not yet given up all hope—that a last desperate effort was to be made to divide the Allies and to align Japan with the Huns.

They might have guessed then that this effort would be directed toward intercepting or delaying the all-important documents now on their way to the Peace Conference by a Transatlantic service never before attempted.

CHAPTER X

Pursued by an Enemy Plane

BUT if the lads against whom their menace, their malice and their machinations were directed were not aware of the activities of these German spies and servants, the Secret Service of the United States was, and its watchful eye was upon them—more cleverly discerning than ever the eye of Constabule Allerson had been in following the movements and thwarting the purposes of that agent of evil, Henryson.

And even as these Hun tools now were watching the American plane disappear over the horizon, so two Government agents, from the secret recesses of the long abandoned Coast Guard storehouse were observing their every movement by the aid of two pairs of strong marine glasses.

Apparently mere curiosity-seekers and hangers-on around the scene of the proposed Transatlantic hop-off, these two men had been constantly on guard, and as a matter of fact, to continue the concealment of their

own identity, had apparently unconsciously dropped the tip which had first put Captain Allerson close on the trail of the incendiary and plane-fixer, Henryson.

So it was that within the next ten minutes one of the two, first making certain that he was unobserved, hurriedly left the rear of their hiding-place, leaving his companion there to continue the vigil while he took a circuitous route and a little later, in what seemed to be the most aimless manner, and with a vacant grin on his face like the veriest bumpkin, strolled up to the hangar where all these hasty preparations were going forward.

The man on the door, who gave all the evidence of merely loafing there, but who in reality was an eagle-eyed "look-out," saw the apparent backwoodsman approaching and returned his grin with a scowl.

"Howdy?" the disguised Secret Service man saluted, evidencing an intent to enter into conversation.

"Same to you; what d'you want?" the man on the door returned sharply.

"Nothin', less you got a spare chaw on ye," the other replied.

"Don't chew," came the surly reply.

"Smoke?" The agent, entirely ignoring

the other's tone and manner, produced and offered a pouch of tobacco.

The man on the door was by this time approaching a rage. Also the other man by this time had gained a position from which he could see almost the entire interior of the hangar. It was as he suspected, although he gave no evidence of even understanding what was going on within. They were preparing for the flight!

"Look here," said the irate look-out testily, rejecting the proffered pouch, "I like my own tobacco best, same as I like my own company best."

"H'm," exclaimed the Secret Service man, vacantly, as though trying to interpret the significance of this subtle sarcasm. "Wall," he opined finally, "thar's all sorts o' tobacco, same's thar's all sorts o' comp'ny, an' thar's no accountin' fer the queer tastes some people has."

He strolled on, leaving the look-out fuming. In ten minutes he was back giving his colleague a good laugh at what had taken place. However, they had little time for the amusing side of their experiences, for theirs was a serious work—as serious in its way as was that of our four friends in another, and the

efforts of all were directed toward getting those secret and highly important documents to the Peace Conference without molestation and before there was an open rupture there.

And all this while the crew entrusted with this important work was cutting across the Atlantic, putting mile after mile between the 600-horsepower dual-motor hydroplane and the shores of America.

A hasty conference brought the two Secret Service men to the conclusion that no time should be wasted in reporting to headquarters just what the situation was. So at different times, and taking different routes, they strolled toward the center of town, where one of them entered the telegraph office and sent off, to a certain Henry Billings, on "F" Street, Washington, D. C., this apparently commonplace message: "Lumber all shipped; expect to leave here tonight."

To Billings, otherwise the head of the Secret Service, who now was in constant touch with members of the Cabinet, it carried a more pertinent import, for it told him that the plane which they already had learned might be used to pursue the Transatlantic messengers had been made completely ready and probably would put out that evening

The Cabinet was hastily called together in special meeting, and the summons also brought General Bronson, head of the air service. But after all, what was there to be said? The die had been cast, so to speak, and the lads now were far out over the ocean, with no alternative but to continue the race at top speed to prevent a meeting with the enemy plane, which doubtless would attack with any weapon and under any circumstance advantageous to itself.

"There is nothing to do but to try at once to get in touch with them by wireless," announced General Bronson. "They are not fools, and although nothing was said to them on this phase of the subject, they probably realized that they were not given a machine gun to mount, with plenty of rounds of ammunition, for nothing."

"Wireless them, then," ordered the Secretary of War briefly. "Give them an outline of the exact situation."

Long ago the men in the giant plane out over the ocean had sailed eastward into the night. Darkness was settling about the national capital, the streets were crowded with homeward-bound throngs of shop and business people, as General Bronson jumped

into a waiting taxicab, and, with an abrupt order to the uniformed man at the wheel, was shot through the city and beyond its limits, toward the great Government wireless station, in violation of every traffic regulation that ever had been laid down for the District of Columbia.

"R-S-7," he fairly shouted at the operator before he was fully into the radio room. "R-S-7, quick."

The operator, realizing whom this call was for and that something really urgent must be in the wind to so disturb the usually imperturbable General Bronson, threw on his switch and began sending out through the ether successive repetitions of the aeroplane's code call, "R-S-7"—"R-S-7"—"R-S-7"—"R-S-7."

For twenty minutes this was kept up, while the perspiration stood out upon the brow of the man who had declared upon his reputation that these four, of all the men in the air service, were the most competent for the fulfilling of the delicate and dangerous task which had been imposed upon them. He paced the floor back and forth, stopping now and then by the operator, but saying nothing.

Presently the radio man ceased tapping with the key which with every contact seemed

to release a streak of blue lightning from the delicately tuned apparatus above their heads. He was listening intently. Something had taken his entire attention.

"Have you got them?" General Bronson finally demanded, unable longer to control his impatience.

"Somebody's picked us up, and they're trying to say something, but I can't catch it," the operator at length answered, still straining to hear the faintest and almost indistinguishable tap-taps which at intervals came to his trained ear.

He arose abruptly and strode across the room. There he pulled a lever, turned a switch, and then resumed his seat, hastily clapping on the earpieces again.

His features began to relax. He reached for the sending key, then apparently changed his mind and grasped a pencil and pad of paper. But before he could begin to write his countenance fell, and he turned wearily toward the anxiously waiting General.

"Had them then, I'm sure," he said, "but lost them the next second."

"It's their speed," the General asserted quickly. "Probably they can get you all right, because you're sending with more

power. Tell them to slow down and repeat their message."

The operator followed these instructions, and a few seconds later looked up smiling. Straining to catch every click recorded in his ear, he wrote:

"Fully understand—ready for emergency—constant watch and full speed—Bentner."

"Ask them their position now," the General snapped out.

The radio operator began sending again, but there was no response, and repeated efforts were unsuccessful.

"They're probably pounding out for Europe at the best speed that the craft will develop now," the operator finally announced. "And if they are, their spark plugs will sufficiently divert the radio to prevent their message carrying this far."

The General eyed him for an instant in amazement, started to say something and then apparently changed his mind. He turned to go.

"If you hear from them again, 'phone me instantly," he said. "I'll be at my office throughout the night."

"Yes, sir," the operator responded respectfully, and resumed his position at the radio.

CHAPTER XI

In the Teeth of a Hurricane

EVEN with the present practicability of the aeroplane, equipped with every known invention and device for expediting and safeguarding flights, a Transatlantic air voyage is something not to be regarded lightly, nor indeed to be undertaken at all, except by the hardiest and most courageous of men, endowed with a supreme fatalism and an all-enduring self-confidence.

With the fall of darkness, just as had been expected and reported by the Secret Service operatives who were watching the rapidly-unfolding developments there, the enemy plane, equally as well equipped and perhaps as powerful as the other, had put off in pursuit only a few minutes after the wireless went out from Washington in warning of that expected eventuality.

And quickly following the enemy departure had gone another radio, informing the leading plane of that fact. The message had been received, and indeed a reply had been sent;

but it had dissipated itself in the air and had never reached the delicately-tuned instrument at which an operator sat breathless, seeking to catch the faintest sound wave.

Why had not the pursuing plane been stopped? The answer was clear. It was on Canadian soil. To have even attempted to intercept her would have entailed an almost endless and detailed explanation to the Canadian authorities, and this in turn would have required a full revelation of the lengths to which the American Government was going to maintain world stability of peace.

Even in the interim the plane probably would have departed, but at any rate all these considerations had been weighed hastily but carefully in Washington and the final decision was to leave everything to the lads in the leading plane, depending upon their skill as aviators, their courage as fighters, if events reached that stage, their ingenuity as Americans to accomplish successfully their given task and get the documents to Paris.

What, then, of the four young men who, compelled to contend with all the natural and inevitable and manifold difficulties of such an endeavor, by this time found themselves required to watch for an enemy from behind,

while facing from the front what threatened to become a terrific storm, driving on toward them even as they drove into it?

Although Don Harlan, alert every second of the time, and aided by Fred Bentner, who now could do nothing unless they picked up the radio of some ship, had carefully charted every mile of their course thus far, and knew, according to the compass, that they were still headed right, some strange intuition told him that the rising wind was blowing them further off their course than they realized, and in a direction where they might expect even worse and continued bad weather.

A delicately balanced level told him that for hours they had maintained an almost undeviatingly horizontal position, and therefore a sustained altitude, and yet the approaching storm was further heralded by a steadily falling barometer.

With the receipt of the wireless warning they had opened the throttles of the motors wide, and their air speed was now one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, but there were doubts as to whether they were making headway of more than half that speed, with the wind increasing in velocity momentarily, and the plane beginning to rock and sway under the impact of these opposed forces.

"We won't try to ride this," Big Jack announced heavily, as a veritable gale struck them with such suddenness as to swerve them considerably off their course. "Altitude is what we want. We'll get above it."

Alas for sailors sailing new and unchartered seas, and aviators encountering previously unknown wind channels and air currents!

This storm came upon them so suddenly, broke upon them with such fury, beat them seemingly from all sides at once with such unprecedented force, that the very effort to tilt the rudder threatened to carry that and the whole after part of the plane away, bringing upon them disaster and destruction.

Andy, with feet and hands taut, turned a pale face toward Big Jack. The seriousness of the situation was equally reflected there, although the young giant's chin stuck out in a way that augured no admission of any but the most overwhelming defeat.

Again they tried to mount the storm to get to a height where they would be out of the reach of its worst elements, but a second time the effort was unsuccessful. The wind was coming in waves which threatened to tear the tremendous wings entirely away from the fusilage of the plane. Beneath them the

ocean was being lashed into a fury of giant combers which, as they could see them, most resembled the constant opening and shutting of the great maw of some beast of prey, patiently, expectantly, awaiting their destruction.

The big-cylindered motors still were smashing out all the power they had in them and the propellers were lashing the air with seemingly uninterrupted force; the air-speed indicator still stood at one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, and petrol was being consumed at an alarming rate; yet the lads all felt now that they were doing nothing more than holding their own—virtually remaining stationary over one spot which at any instant now might become their unmarked and unknown grave.

Any schoolboy is familiar with the principle that if two locomotives meet in a head-on collision, each traveling at a speed of, say, sixty miles an hour, the impact is the same as though one locomotive, going 120 miles an hour, had collided with one standing still.

If their guess was correct, therefore, that they were merely maintaining a stationary position, it was clear that up to this time the plane was combatting a pressure equivalent

to two hundred and fifty miles' speed per hour. No plane long could endure such a tremendous test.

"I've heard the expression 'a tough night for the sailors,'" Andy shouted across to Big Jack, for it was difficult now for them to make themselves heard above the pounding of the engines, the scream of the storm and the beating of the propellers, even within the enclosed nacelle. "But," Andy continued, "I'm willing to agree right now that this is a rougher night on aviators."

"Yes," Jack shouted back, "and we're going to adopt seamen's tactics. We can't seem to get above this storm, and there's only one other thing to do. If we can bank and turn without spilling over completely we'll ride it out, even if it carries us back to Halifax."

Each man realized that upon the deftness with which they acted when the opportune moment came, their lives depended.

"Ready!" shouted Jack, who had been counting the alternate periods with which the heavier blasts had struck them, and felt the exact second approaching when the difficult maneuver might be attempted with least hazard.

"Right!" came the triple chorus in turn.

"Ready for a right bank!" Jack called out an instant later. "Over now!"

Each man at his appointed place, each carrying out his expected task, they worked with the perfectly adjusted rhythm of a unified machine.

For what seemed several minutes they wavered at a terrific and dangerous angle. The wind tore at the wings with what seemed like maniacal fury. At any instant it seemed that they would be carried away. Jack grabbed a lever and suddenly shot a double dose of petrol into the engines. They put forth their mightiest effort in just the nick of time. It was sufficient to drag them upward a dozen feet, and another gale of wind that would have completely capsized them at their previous level, as suddenly righted them now—and they were headed down the hurricane at a speed that human beings never had traveled before.

They cut down their speed considerably by all but shutting the throttles and depending only upon the force of the storm; but at no time did they dare completely shut off their power, for at irregular intervals the sudden shooting on of a full speed was all that righted

them when the wind unexpectedly swerved to another quarter and with no advance warning attacked them first upon the port and then upon the starboard sides.

For three hours the terror of the storm continued, and then it took a northern course and began abating almost as suddenly as it had appeared. The sea, too, began to subside almost as soon as the heavy winds ceased, and as dawn approached and the clouds began to break there was little to indicate that the lads, due to the staunch durability of their plane, had ridden out one of the worst northern storms of that season.

But repairs were necessary to more than one part of the plane, and it was impossible to make a safe landing where they were. The compass showed them that in the power of the hurricane they had been heading east by north. To seek a calmer sea they turned almost directly south, and at 8 A.M., with the sun shining brightly, made a landing upon the surface of the ocean, which seemed entirely undisturbed by the cyclonic rage of the storm which had mighty nearly cost the four young men their lives.

Wires needed tightening, the rudder required bracing, a thorough inspection was

their only safeguard against further difficulties. They descended, knowing that probably valuable hours would have to be given to the task.

But the thought came to each, What would they have done had they not had pontoons for landing on the surface of the ocean?

CHAPTER XII

Desperate Haste

"WELL, everything being as it is—in other words, things being as they will be," shouted out Fred Bentner after they had landed, experiencing a reaction of joy and relief at finding himself and the others safe and uninjured after the most harrowing experience of their lives, "I wonder just where we are?"

"Simple as A-B-C," Andy Flures responded, without the ghost of a smile. "We're on the good old Atlantic—nice little Atlantic—somewhere between the Equator and the North Pole."

"Yeh," Fred answered back. "As simple as I-D-I-O-T. Where on the Atlantic? is what I'd like to know. For all any of us can prove right now, we might be in the Gulf of Mexico. I feel as though we'd traveled further than that since midnight."

"We'll know where we are in a few minutes," Don promised, laying out a pad of paper, some charts and astronomical measuring instruments. Old Sol will tell us."

"How?" asked Fred, speaking perhaps before he gave the matter a second thought.

"Why," Don answered in surprise, at the same time glancing at his watch, "it is now 8.30 o'clock. If I know the sun's exact position with relation to Halifax at 8.30 in the morning, I can pretty nearly get our position with relation to Halifax by the sun's position toward us at that time."

"I-D-I-O-T," laughed Andy, and stepped quickly out onto one of the pontoons to begin the examination of the first of the flying wires. Fred pretended not to hear the remark, and it required only a suggestion from Big Jack to remind them that their troubles and difficulties were by no means over; that the worst, although of a different character, might yet be ahead; that above all else now haste was necessary in getting repairs made so that they might speedily be under way again.

But they found more to be done than they had at first thought, because the plane had ridden so evenly after weathering the storm.

Two or three twists had to be given to the turnbuckles on practically every flying, landing, drift and bracing wire on the plane, and this of itself is no simple matter

if every wire is to be subjected to its proper relative tension in order that an extra stress or strain may be so distributed that it will not warp some part out of position.

But the worst damage, and the one which required the longest time to thoroughly repair was to the upper right wing, where a camber rib had snapped and one jagged end pierced the "dope"-treated canvas covering.

Big Jack, the best mechanic of the crew, took personal charge of this repair, but it required the aid of the others. The covering had first to be loosened from the tail edge, and, making this opening no larger than was absolutely necessary, the fractured camber rib sawed off between the two stringers on either side of the break. The two remaining stationary pieces of the camber—that between the leading edge and the main spar, and the other between the rear spar and the trailing edge, were left in as false ribs, but between either of these spars and the center stringer struts had to be placed and fastened, and first fashioning to proper length and size from the little extra material carried for repairs, and afterward fixing them rigidly in place, was a task to try the ability and patience of the best mechanic.

This job alone required four hours of their precious time, and then the canvas had to be warped back taut and fastened again at the trailing edge, with the specially prepared glue, which took two more hours to knit the repair tight.

While the glue was setting they found a crack in the canvas of the lower left wing, which, while not so difficult of repair, nevertheless required attention before they could renew the trip; and it was these and a dozen other more trivial things that detained them, though they worked with a haste born of disappointment

For Don's observations had brought tragically disconcerting results. They found themselves, according to his computations, at almost the exact spot which they had passed at eight o'clock the preceding evening. They were, therefore, some sixteen hours behind schedule time, and would, for a second time, have to traverse the distance between their present point and that at which the storm had overtaken them on the preceding night.

There was no use in being pessimistic about it, however, for it was nothing that could have been prevented, and they had reason to be thankful that they had escaped with their lives and without injury.

"Well," said Andy Flures finally, for Andy always could be depended upon to come forward with something sane and logical, even intensely practical, when things looked gloomiest, "I don't know how you fellows feel about it, but my stomach is whispering to me that if there isn't something forthcoming in the food line pretty soon there's going to be certain and painful rebellion. My suggestion is that we take ten minutes or so before we start to feed up against any other emergencies which may arise. All in favor please say 'eats.'"

"Eats," agreed the other three, and they dove into their greatly diminished rations. They had expected to make the trip in not more than twenty hours, and the eating of this meal, therefore, meant that they had but slight refreshment left to tide them over the balance of the journey.

"The rest of the trip's got to be made without serious incident," Jack said musingly after an inspection of the petrol gauge, "or we'll be running out of fuel. That would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"I've thought of that," Fred replied, "and the situation may arise yet when the radio will pull us out of a tough hole."

"Meaning?" queried Don.

"That we may have to summon a vessel and, if she has any, borrow some gas," explained Fred.

"In a pinch, of course, it would have to be tried," Jack agreed, "but if nothing extraordinary happens I think we can make Ireland with what fuel we have. We wouldn't be at all sure that we could reach a vessel anyway, you know, and especially one carrying petrol."

"Yes, I know," Fred agreed. "Nevertheless I'm more satisfied that we're equipped to speak out our wants in event we have to."

"Well," said Jack, again surveying the plane preliminary to their second start, "all's set; let's go."

They climbed into the nacelle, closed it tightly, took their respective places, again gave the gas to their good old engines, again the propellers whirled and the rapid-fire explosions within the cylinders were as music to their ears. They skimmed out across the surface of the ocean for perhaps a hundred yards and then once more rose to the flight.

"Wonder what happened to Braizewell's plane, and whether it got away or had to turn back," Don speculated, as they settled down to good going again.

"I hope to Hector it got hit by that storm that caught us, and that it put them completely out of business for all time," said Andy Flures fervently. "That machine and those connected with it have been our hoodoos since we arrived at Halifax. It certainly hasn't been Braizewell's fault that he hasn't put the jinx on us."

"Yep," Don answered, "but nevertheless I'll bet it was just their luck to escape that storm. You remember it took a sudden northward course, and I'm pretty certain it turned before they came up with it."

"Too bad, if that's true," said Andy morosely. As a matter of fact, there hadn't been anything to so ruffle his nature in years as this series of incidents which had begun with his having to stand Pilot Henryson on his head in the mud and mire of the Halifax aero field.

"Do you think we ought to wireless back that we were damaged and delayed by the storm?" Don asked, addressing himself to all three. "They'll be wondering what happened to us long before we arrive on the other side."

"Wouldn't do at all," said Jack quickly. "In the first place, we probably couldn't reach a shore station with the strength of our

radio, and in the second we'd be more likely to give that other plane our exact location; and with the papers we're carrying I'd rather not have a scrimmage if it can be avoided."

"That's right," Don agreed. "I hadn't thought about the other machine following us."

"Listen! !" said Fred sharply only a few moments later.

Everyone instantly ceased talking, and to make things quieter both engines were shut off and the plane was allowed to float along on her own tremendous momentum.

"What is it?" asked Jack, looking anxiously at Fred, who remained intent, with the earpieces of the radio apparatus held close to his ears with both hands. "Getting something?" Jack continued, almost unconsciously, but at the same time having to give ninety per cent of his attention to steering and manipulating the plane, which was going along without power.

"Yes," answered Fred slowly. "And it's that other plane. They're not far behind us. They're talking to an ocean liner, and asking the ship if she's sighted us."

"By golly, if we weren't carrying these Government documents—" Jack began.

"The ship is asking who we are and who they are," Fred interrupted.

"And what are those crooks answering?" demanded Andy Flures.

Fred held up his hand for silence. Of a sudden his face took on a dark scowl. "Well, the highbinders!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"What now?" asked Don.

"They're saying," Fred answered, "that we're wanted by the Federal Government; that we have stolen papers and are seeking to transfer them to a foreign cruiser that is to meet us somewhere in the Atlantic. They say they are a Government craft in pursuit."

"All right," said Jack, again throwing full power on the engines. "One more score to settle when the reckoning comes—and I'm thinking its going to come before we reach the other side."

"The sooner the better," said the now aroused Andy, at the same time crawling forward to put the first strip of ammunition into the machine gun. "Yes, sir, the sooner the better; and when the time arrives, I want to work this little spitfire here," indicating the gun.

They were now racing ahead at the highest speed the two motors would develop. There was scarcely a perceptible adverse wind, and their course was due east.

CHAPTER XIII

The Battle in the Clouds

FOR three hours they had raced along thus, and then the first trouble developed with one of the motors. It blew out a spark plug.

Now, while this is not a difficult repair for an expert motor mechanic, nevertheless it necessitated another costly delay, and when they again got under way with full power it was with the determination that nothing short of a catastrophe should again interfere with their passage.

"As it stands now," said Jack, "if we go on without interruption we're likely to hit the Irish coast in the dead of night. Even at that, though, I'll be solemn glad to set foot on land again."

"So say we all of us; so say we all of us," Andy chimed, in the words and tune of a well-known song.

Fifteen minutes later they sighted the first ship they had seen since leaving Halifax. Up to the present this hadn't seemed strange

to them; as a matter of fact they hadn't been thinking of surface vessels; but now that they gave it consideration they realized it was because they had been carried off their course by the storm, or couldn't see the lights of one because their own attention was given entirely to trying to save their own craft.

"Looks pretty badly battered, at that," said Don, opening the fusilage and gazing downward. "Fred, let me have the glasses, will you?"

He took the powerful glasses and for a moment gazed downward. Then he began to laugh. "They're sizing us up the same way," he chuckled. "Guess we do look strange to them, away out here."

In another moment something happened which made them all sit up and take notice. There was a puff of smoke, a faint report, and a bullet whizzed through the air not more than fifteen yards away from them.

"Holy smoke!" shouted Andy. "It's all clear now. That's the ship that Braizewell's wireless was talking to. They take us for air pirates with stolen government papers."

In another instant they shot upward at amazing speed, in a zigzag course.

"Haven't got the time or inclination to

argue it out with them," said Jack, "although if they don't keep that pop gun still we'll turn our nose down and let 'em have a volley, just by way of a return salute. They can't maneuver out of the way as we can."

But by now they not only were out of range of the gun on the ship, but also almost out of sight of the vessel's crew.

"Ta, ta, Jenny," Andy waved over the side, in mock misery at parting company. "See you later where the grass is greener."

At an altitude of nearly two miles they were skimming through the air at something more than a hundred miles an hour when Fred again uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What now?" Don demanded.

"Wait!"

Again the engines were shut down to permit Fred to hear more clearly.

"The other plane and the ship are talking again, but I can't make it out," he explained. "It's all garbled, and I can only get a word here and there. Sounds like some sort of a code. By Jingo! It is! They're evidently talking to some other ship, and one friendly to them, at that. Conversation don't make sense at all."

He listened intently for a few moments

and then gave a grunt of disgust. "They've stopped," he said. "Nothing more doing."

However, this was to be Fred's busy day, and only another short interval elapsed when something came to his ears that caused him to straighten up instantly to the closest attention.

Don, sitting near him and watching him, saw his eyes widen perceptibly, as though he was incredulous of what he heard. For several seconds he sat in the same position, not a muscle of his tense countenance changing, and then unconsciously his right hand went out toward his sending key. It rested there, however, and he sat immovable, making no effort to throw on the switch to connect the power necessary to send out a radio.

"Here," he said at last, clapping the earpieces onto the head of the surprised Don. "You don't know the radio code, but just raise and lower your hand with the length of each sound you hear. I don't know whether I'm hearing straight or have gone looney."

It was a moment before Don could distinguish anything, for he was not trained to the sound of the radio; but after an interval he suddenly raised his hand, then dropped it again, raised it and dropped it, at varying

intervals in time with the short and long sounds he heard, and resembling in his actions some sort of an automatic contrivance more than a human being.

For he could neither understand nor interpret what he was, however, merely verifying to the astonished Fred.

"Do you know what that is?" the latter asked of the other two, who now were as interested as the mystified Don was.

"What?" asked Jack.

Before answering, Fred again put the receivers over his own ears. The call still was being repeated.

"Our call," he informed them brusquely. "R-S-7—and there's no doubt that it's being sent out by that other plane. Shall I answer?"

"Not under any circumstance," Jack commanded, for the first time really exerting his prerogative as captain of the crew.

"They're saying something," interjected Fred, grabbing pencil and pad and beginning to write rapidly.

A moment later he laid aside the receivers and picked up the paper to read aloud. "Listen to this," he said. "Here's what I caught: 'R-S-7, If you can catch this, reply immediately. Mistake been made. Return at once.'"

"Who signs it?" Jack asked.

"No signature at all; they just kept repeating that message," said Fred.

"Well, let 'em keep on repeating it," Jack snapped out. "Poor idiots! They might know that scheme wouldn't work. They just want to get a line on where we are. If Bronson or anybody in authority wanted to reach us it would come in our code. It shows, though, that those fellows are determined to reach us for a mix-up if they can."

"Yes," said Don, picking up the marine glasses and gazing intently to the westward behind them, "and it looks as though they were going to come mighty near doing it, too. Great Scott, Jack! take those glasses and look at that burst of speed."

He handed the glasses to Big Jack, while the others also turned their gaze to where the naked eye could just discern a slowly enlarging speck over the western horizon.

For a full minute Jack remained with the glasses to his eyes. Then he turned to look at his own air-speed indicator.

"We're doing a hundred and fifteen," he announced. "We'll put her up to a hundred and twenty-five, and without the aid of a favorable wind that's about the best we can

do. Figuring the way they've been crawling up on us, even with us going at a hundred and fifteen, they must be doing something like a hundred and thirty-five at least."

He pondered for a moment and turned another backward glance. "Well," he ejaculated at last. "I guess those papers are more important than even we guessed. Those fellows aren't coming through on petrol: *they're using a mixture of at least twenty-five per cent ether!*"

Twenty minutes elapsed and it developed into what well might have been a life-and-death race, with the pursuing plane steadily cutting down the intervening distance—steadily gaining on the one that already was plowing through the air at the rate of a hundred and twenty-seven miles an hour according to the air-speed indicator, and probably not less than a hundred and twenty miles an hour ground speed.

Another half hour and the pursuing machine had sufficiently reduced the distance to let go the first volley of shots from her machine gun.

"Ah," exclaimed Jack, "prepared for action, eh? Well, maybe we can give them a little surprise. I don't think they know we're armed."

He started climbing, and so suddenly and at such an acute angle that the pilot of the other plane could not see the intended maneuver soon enough to parallel the course.

"If it's really a fight they want, I reckon the time has arrived when we'll have to stop and give it to them," he breathed again through clenched teeth. He and Andy now were working together like a pair of Siamese twins. The dual motors were turning out a new specimen of power, as though by some human intelligence they, too, realized that the moment of supreme test had come.

"Don," Jack shouted, "you'll have to work that machine gun. Andy is needed here in the cock-pit."

CHAPTER XIV

Destruction of the Enemy

As Don crawled forward to take his place behind the shielded shoulder of the machine gun, Fred stripped himself of the wireless paraphernalia to become mechanician while Jack and Andy gave all their time to the engines and the maneuvering. At the same time they climbed higher, maintaining the advantage which always is with the upper plane in aerial battle.

"Get ready, Don," Jack shouted, as the big machine swerved about and banked steeply for a sudden dive at the machine below.

Before the crew of the latter could even guess what was going to happen, much less get into position for firing their own gun, mounted forward, Don opened up with a hail of bullets which cut the lower left wing of the enemy machine in a dozen places and made her all the more difficult to manuever or manage.

A skilled pilot was in charge of her, how-

ever, and even with this damage the giant plane wheeled gracefully, circling for an advantage which Jack and Andy refused to give. Up, up, up they went, cutting, crossing, swerving, always seeking for position.

And then like a flash Jack gave the order and they turned on the enemy. Again Don let go a fusillade that sounded like the rapid rat-a-tat of a great drum. It was another bull's eye, and one of the bullets apparently took the pilot in the right arm, for Fred, looking over, saw it drop limp at his side, while he frantically grasped at levers with his left hand, and said something sharply to another member of his crew.

The enemy, too, was firing his machine gun at every opportunity, but thus far the maneuvering of the American plane had been too sudden and swift to permit of anything like an aim, and the nearest shower of bullets went harmlessly by, several yards to the right.

Again Jack gave his engines all the petrol they would take, and there was another skyward spurt at hair-raising speed. No one direction was maintained for a full minute at a time, however, and even at that the enemy finally got a head-on opportunity and sent a charge that lodged several bullets in the outer

fusilage. There was an instant change of course, and a few seconds later Don was given another opportunity to show what he knew about machine gun firing. He gave a most excellent accounting.

The rudder of the enemy plane was almost entirely shot away!

A skilful pilot may not necessarily regard that as a disaster, but already the pilot of the other machine was disabled, and the battle was raging so furiously that no opportunity offered for another of the crew to take his place.

With only one able hand and arm to work with the fellow did remarkably well, but he could not handle the giant plane successfully under such a handicap.

Even then, and in that desperate situation, Jack and his crew would have let up in mercy had not the enemy, in a long, circling dive again renewed the fire.

Jack nodded his head to Andy, and Fred, understanding the signal, got ready to do his part. They banked at a dangerous, nerve-racking angle, and then in a long, sweeping curve came down upon the already crippled machine which could not get out of the way.

Don loosened such a miniature artillery

that two of the crew fell over either mortally wounded or killed outright. The firing never ceased, nor was the course of the plane changed until it was within fifty yards of the other machine and it seemed that a fatal collision was imminent.

The final volley tore both wings of the other plane so badly that she wavered, washed in the wind for a few seconds and then, as a spurt of flame appeared where fire had started from a leaking petrol tank, she settled into a swift and disastrous nose dive.

Don saw what happened; the others had too much to do in righting their own plane at that instant to pay attention to anything else. Jack and Andy had come literally as near as a hair losing control of their own plane in making the final attack which disposed of the other. As a matter of fact, had they not been such masters of their machine, all might have gone to the fate that the others found as the reward for their treacherous undertaking.

"What happened?" Jack asked of Don, when the machine again was under control. He had not realized that they had completely put the other machine out of business, and seemed somewhat surprised when, on looking

about, he did not find it in pursuit, or dashing away on the defensive.

"It's all over," Don assured them. "You can take it easy now."

They did. They looked over the side of their own machine and saw what remained of a crushed and broken fusilage—just bits of wood and some strips of canvas—floating on the surface of the sea.

"They fell straight as an arrow, but in a tail dive, after that final attack," Don said. "It was really sickening to see them fall. It must have been four thousand feet at the least."

"Afire?" Jack asked.

"Yes, but completely out of business before the flames broke out," Don continued. "The pilot got a bullet in the right arm early in the mix-up, and I guess two of the others never knew what happened to them. When they struck it was with a splash like that sent up by a depth bomb. As a matter of fact, I didn't think anything connected with the machine would ever come to the surface again."

"Guess we'd better circle down and see if by chance any one of them should be alive and in sight," Jack suggested.

He changed course and they began a circling downward descent. Some fifty yards away from the floating débris they made a landing. The sea was comparatively calm and they experienced little difficulty in settling on its surface without jolt, splash or damage. For several moments they lay there, looking intently at what remained of that which once had been Braizewell's powerful twin-motor biplane. There was not a sign of human life, not an evidence of anything indicating it.

"Don," said Jack, "for the purposes of a full report on this incident you had better note as exactly as possible the time and place where it occurred."

"Yes," Don responded, "I had thought of that, and I've already got my reckonings. It's merely a matter of recording them, which I'll do at once."

"Too bad for them," Jack said, with genuine sorrow in his voice. "But it was they or we. There was nothing else to it. They forced the issue and we had no alternative. I wonder who they were."

"I saw them all, at one time or another during the firing," Don then informed his companions. "But there was only one I thought I might have seen somewhere before.

But when it was, or where, I'm at a loss to tell. As a matter of fact, I'm not at all certain that I ever saw him. But somehow his face seemed familiar."

"Well, we'd better be on our way," said Jack. "No use in staying around here. Those fellows probably went down so far that, even if they're not entangled in the wreckage, it's doubtful whether they ever would come up again."

"I've got it!" ejaculated Don abruptly.

"Keep it then," advised Andy, good-naturedly, despite the latest excitement they had been through.

"I've got it! That's it, surely," Don repeated again, gazing out abstractedly, as one will when absorbed in some recollection.

"Got what?" demanded Fred, impatiently. "Better get rid of it if you have, don't you think?"

"Eh?" Don looked at him blankly. "Oh, yes. Say! Do you know who that fellow was that I thought I recognized in that plane?"

"No, who?" asked Jack, keenly interested.

"Remember the day I came limping back with a badly crippled plane, after having been over the German lines, and was just able to make a descent within our own?"

"Sure!" they exclaimed, all at once.

"That was the fellow I had the battle with. I'm sure of it. I knew I'd seen him before, and that's when it was."

"Well, he's probably battling with Davy Jones now," said Andy soothingly. "You've had your revenge, and he'll never fight another air duel on this earth."

CHAPTER XV

Fuel from a Tanker

"FRED," said Jack, several hours later, when the afternoon was waning, "I think you'll have to get busy."

"Meaning what?" asked Fred. Apparently they were going along at top speed and without cause for further concern. Nevertheless there was a worried look on Jack's face, and this was something unusual.

"Busy with your own suggestion of some time back," Jack responded.

Andy, who had been listening to this conversation, let his eye wander to the instrument board, and he gave vent to a low whistle. "Right!" he said.

"Don't get you yet," Fred repeated, bewildered.

"We're going to run out of fuel before we reach the other side," Jack announced. "You'd better open up with the radio and see if we can reach a vessel that will replenish our supply."

"How do we stand?" asked Don anxiously.

"Oh, we've got enough for the immediate present, but not sufficient to carry us all the way," Jack answered, and Andy nodded his head in affirmation of the statement.

Fred, who had not put on the headpiece of the wireless since the battle with the other plane, now adjusted the earpieces, pushed forward the switch, and opened up with that call which almost unfailingly will bring a response from any other radio within receiving distance of the message—S O S.

Time and again he repeated it, but without getting an indication of a response.

"Don," said Jack at last, "you've got the charts there. How do we stand with regard to the regular steamer route?"

"We're miles off it just now," the navigator responded. "Too far to the north."

"Suppose we changed our course?"

"Well, if you'd point her west by south for half an hour or so I think we'd at least come within radio distance of something," Don said, after a moment of thought.

"That's what we'll do then," the chief pilot announced, and immediately fitted the action to the word.

In this altered course they continued for

more than a quarter of an hour, with Fred still sounding out the distress call of the International code.

"Hear anything?" Jack finally queried, eyeing the petrol indicator.

"Nary a sound."

Don consulted his charts and reckonings again and advised two points further south. Jack immediately brought the plane around to that suggested course, and in ten more minutes the mathematics and judgment of Don Harlan were vindicated.

Fred's face suddenly beamed, and unconsciously he slapped his knee.

"Got anybody?" Andy asked.

"Yep, getting a reply."

For a few moments all remained silent, unable to do more than watch Fred as he alternately listened and then tapped off mysterious dots and dashes on the radio. Finally he relieved the tension. He removed the earpieces for a moment to address himself to Don.

"What's T-K-R?" he asked.

"Why, tanker," Don answered immediately.

Fred cast his eye at the chart, stepped over to regard it more carefully, then turned his gaze to a penciled memorandum he had made.

Without another word he again adjusted the earpieces, took hold of the sending key and began a veritable chatter with the mysterious and unseen tanker which he had picked up somewhere on the wide expanse of the Atlantic.

"Righto!" he ejaculated finally, aloud, again removing the apparatus. "Jack," he said, addressing himself to that rather worried individual, "I wasn't such a bad guesser this morning, after all, was I? Well, I've landed the tanker, all right, and according to Don's reckonings and her information our paths cross."

"Great!"

"But she can't spare much petrol."

"Well, you—" Andy got no further.

"Probably fifty gallons," Fred finished.

Jack did some quick mental calculating. "Fifty's better than none, and probably will carry us through," he finally announced. "At any rate, we'll be thankful for whatever she can spare us. Did you tell her we're in an aeroplane?"

"Yes," Fred answered, chuckling. "That's what all the conversation was about. The operator evidently had the captain alongside of him, and he must be a good sportsman himself. Thought it was the real Trans-

atlantic contest, and of course I didn't disillusion them. But I had a hard time at first making them believe that we were in a plane. The operator bluntly told me to quit my kidding. Wanted to know what I meant by making a josh out of the S O S."

"When ought we to come across them?" was Jack's next inquiry.

For a moment Fred and Don figured together, then examined the compass and drew several lines upon the chart.

"Keep your present course," Don finally said, "and at our speed, with the tanker fifty miles away when Fred first got her, and she headed this way, we ought to sight each other in the next twenty minutes."

Again he was right. Hardly that time had elapsed when Fred, with the powerful marine glasses as an aid, shouted out that he could discern a streak of smoke.

Don took the glasses, and before he brought them down from his eyes the two-miles-a-minute speed of the plane had brought the vessel into sight.

"Gosh!" Jack breathed, with a long-drawn sigh. "She's the most welcome thing I've seen in a month of Sundays."

From an altitude of six thousand feet they

began a slow descent, but without a decrease of speed. With the aid of the glasses Don could now discern some one, doubtless the captain of the tanker, on the bridge, gazing toward them intently.

The distance between them had now been reduced to not more than three miles, and the throttles were closed and all power shut off for the long downward glide which would bring them close to the vessel.

So straight was their course that as they neared they caused a small panic on the tanker. Captain and crew suddenly came to the disconcerting conviction that the plane had gotten beyond control and was going to crash upon them. There was a great scurrying about, and, unexpected by Jack and Andy, the ship suddenly veered in her course, almost bringing about that which her captain was trying to avoid.

As a result, Jack had to put the rudder down hard, throw on the power, and take an upward course which would clear them of the zigzagging steamer. In a wide circle the plane then was brought to the surface, so close to the ship that the respective officers and crews could converse without the use of megaphones.

"Who are you?" the captain of the tanker demanded, when he had recovered from mixed feelings of fear and admiration, brought on first by the narrow escape from a collision, and then by the expert surface landing which the hydro-aeroplane made.

"Americans entrants in the Transatlantic," Jack responded instantly. "Guess we're in the lead. Haven't sighted any of the others, have you?"

"I should say not," the captain replied, "and I wouldn't have believed my eyes if I had seen one headed this way, if it hadn't been we got your wireless first. Say! You fellows have got some nerve, all right. Any accidents?"

"Oh, had to stop a couple of times for minor repairs," Jack answered modestly. "And we got into the teeth of a hurricane that drove us back two or three hundred miles. That's the reason we're short of fuel. Can you spare any?"

"What are you using?"

"Petrol."

"H'm! Well, we've got some pretty good class gas aboard, but we'll need most of it ourselves. Your trip is most over, and you might say ours has hardly begun."

"Pay you well for it," Jack suggested.

"Say," the captain came back at him instantly. "You can't pay me a cent. I can spare you about fifty gallons, as I said in the wireless, and that's all I can cut out of my own supply. If that will help, you're welcome to it."

"It certainly will help, but it won't get us to Ireland," Jack responded evenly.

"Well, what in the deuce are you going to do?"

"That's just the problem," Big Jack answered, "and it's a tough one, too."

"Oh, darn it all, I'll give you a hundred and depend on making port on what I've got left," the captain of the tanker finally announced. "How are you going to load it?"

"Got a pump and hose?"

"Sure."

"Then we'll pull up right alongside and take it into the tank that way."

Jack started the propellers whirling slowly, just enough to carry the plane around and toward the side of the tanker. The captain watched this work with open-mouthed admiration.

"Say!" he ejaculated, at the same time squirting forth a great stream of tobacco juice. "Ever been a sailor?"

"No, never have," Jack had to admit.

"Well, you handle that job as if you had," the captain informed him. "First rate job, that."

"Thanks," Jack returned, at the same time grabbing at the end of hose that was tossed over to him. "And let me say this, sir," he added, as he fitted the rubber pipe line into the petrol tank, "if there's ever any way any of us can serve you, just you call on us, and don't be modest about it."

He took a note book from his pocket, wrote down their four names and the general address at which they could be reached, and, rolling it into a ball, tossed it aboard the vessel. "There's our visiting card," he said.

In the ten minutes it required to take aboard the hundred gallons of sorely needed additional fuel, the captain of the tanker proved himself all that Fred had predicted of him. And as they waved their final farewells and the plane took to the air, all felt a pang of genuine regret that the circumstances made it necessary for them to withhold the essential facts as to their actual mission.

CHAPTER XVI

A Matter of Hours

THE darkness of night was again upon them, for although they had now been gone from Halifax a matter of some twenty-seven or eight hours, the reader will keep in mind that they were, so to speak, traveling ever eastward, and therefore toward constantly changing time conditions.

It was well into this second night, when they were rather feeling their way, and at materially reduced speed, and their calculations put them at between four and five hundred miles off the Irish coast, when all of them, now desperately feeling the need of sleep, were aroused by Fred's announcement that they were again receiving a call, this time no doubt genuine.

"It is being relayed by some vessel," he said, "and is in our code."

He picked up the ever-ready pad and pencil and listened intently.

Finally he began to write. Three words

were jotted down, when he reached for the switch and took the sending key, interrupting the operator on the vessel. There was a lengthy sending and receiving back and forth, and then Fred began writing again. He added two more words and there was another interruption.

"Somebody breaking in," he informed Don, who was leaning eagerly over his shoulder, the code book already in his hand, the first steps taken toward translating the message.

But before Don could get further with that interesting work a word from Jack put him back to the duties of navigator, and he had to give detailed information concerning wind retardment, speed, course, etc.

Fred by now was receiving again, and apparently had succeeded in silencing whoever it was who had been interrupting with impertinent queries about the apparently bad grammar of the message.

Don again took up his position behind Fred, the code book handy.

The first word on Fred's sheet was "How." This Don knew from memory was the code word for "Give," so he jotted that down. The next was "paper." He looked this up and added "location."

Fred had now concluded talking with the relaying vessel and was able to aid him by reading from his own memo. "Invent," he called out. The code book revealed the translation as "situation."

Next came "burst," and both smiled at the very logical reason that an outsider had for inquiring what it was all about. Don found it in the "b's" and wrote down "critical."

No doubt about the authenticity of the message now: "Give location—situation critical—"

"Ship," Fred gave the next word.

Twice Don missed the right page in his nervous thumbing of the book, but finally he got it, and found opposite, "when."

The next word was "settled"; and here again in the strange code was a combination to make a seafaring man think something serious had happened. In the code, however, it stood for "will." And the next word, "bring," was found to mean "you."

"Last one," said Fred, encouragingly, "'bounty.'"

At last Don found it and wrote it down—"arrive."

Here, then, was the message complete: "R-S-7: Give location—situation critical—when will you arrive?"

It was read off to Jack and Andy. The former turned it over in his mind for a moment. "Who signed it?" he asked—the inevitable query.

"P.S.Q.J." answered Fred, reserving his greatest surprise for the last.

There was a sudden lifting of brows, the men gazing about at each other and for the moment even forgetting the course of their flight. The message was a direct inquiry on behalf of the President of the United States, then attending the Peace Conference!

"What about it, Don?" Jack asked.

"Well," the navigator replied, making mental calculations and regarding his charts, "we ought to make Ireland in six hours."

"Send that, then," Jack told Fred, "and ask if there are any instructions. But send it in code," he added.

Fred jotted down, "Ireland probably in six hours," laboriously found the code equivalent of each word and wrote it over the top, and then opened up his call again.

The vessel operator soon responded and wanted to know if he couldn't be let in on the secret.

"Picked this up and relayed it," he radiographed, "but where's it come from, and who are you?"

"Let you know later, and obliged for your trouble," Fred wirelessed back. "Tell me who you are and you'll get suitable reward."

With lightning-like speed the distant operator gave his name, ship and home port.

"Right," Fred flashed back. "Now please relay this."

And he gave the code reply and had it repeated to make certain there was no error in the taking of the odd mixture of words.

"New code on me," the taking operator finally commented, when his repeat had been approved as correct. "Whose is it?"

"Your Uncle Samuel's," Fred radioed back, and opened his switch against further inquiries.

"Well, I guess the situation's clear enough," he said, getting up to stretch himself as best he could in their small quarters. Try as he would, he could not repress a yawn.

"If the President of the United States goes to those lengths to try to learn when we will get on European soil, I guess it's a mighty important mission we've been called on to handle," Andy opined.

"Yes," added Jack, "and from what I can make of that message, it's becoming a question of hours as to how the situation will turn."

"That seems to state it," Don agreed. "A matter of hours."

"Well, we've done our best, and against mighty unpleasant obstacles, but of course they won't figure very largely if, after all, we're too late."

"We're heading for Ireland about as fast as anything ever did," Jack informed them, and it required but a glance at the air-speed indicator to prove this. For there was scarcely a perceptible adverse wind, as these experienced aviators could discern by opening up part of the enclosed nacelle, and the indicator registered just a fraction above one hundred and twenty-two miles an hour.

"Coming, Mr. President," Andy muttered. "Coming, sir, like greased lightning."

CHAPTER XVII

The Ten-Mile Glide

IF Don Harlan was in all normal times, and under all natural conditions, a most excellent and trustworthy aerial navigator, as in fact all the other members of this crew knew from experience that he was, so also was he human, and, therefore, subject to human errors. Certainly in the present situation this was not to be unexpected, for he and the others not only had undergone a most extraordinary series of the most harrowing experiences, in rapid-fire succession, but in addition they were nerve-tired and physically fagged for the want of sleep.

They did not reach or even sight Ireland within the predicted six hours, but long before that time they did something which, in view of subsequent events and the demands they put upon the men for every ounce of their courage and ingenuity, proved to be a most excellent thing.

It was Jack's suggestion—or rather, his orders.

"Fred and Don," he had said, immediately after the sending of the wireless, to be relayed to the President, "it's plain sailing now and we won't need either one of you. Both of you curl up somewhere out of the way and take three hours sleep. At the end of that time we'll call you, you two can take charge for the next three hours while Andy and I snooze, and we'll all feel better and more capable for the rest."

None knew at that time how valuable that recuperation, brief as it was, would prove to be.

Under the circumstances and the program which called for an equal division between the four of them of the rest period, it hadn't taken Fred and Don more than two minutes to follow the advice. For three hours they lay like logs, stretched out side by side on the floor of the nacelle, snoring so lustily as to seem to be in competition with the steady throbbing of the engines.

True to promise, at the end of that time Jack awakened them, and, when they had recovered their dulled wits, they took charge while Jack and Andy almost instantly dropped into a heavy sleep.

Another three hours and they were brought

back to life, but still there was no sight of land.

Jack got out the binoculars, as soon as he had gotten the "sand" out of his eyes, for what he termed a "squint" before again taking his place in the pilot's seat.

Just as, hours before, their forward rush had brought the night to them, so now their speed was irresistibly drawing the dawn toward them. Jack held the glasses to his eyes for a moment, then rubbed his eyes vigorously and looked again.

Of a sudden he gave a great whoop, and slapped Don on the back with a force that nearly sent him off his feet.

"Land, gol darn you," Jack shouted for the benefit of all. "Land ahoy, as they say aboard ship!"

"What's that?" demanded Andy, regarding it as news too good to be true. "Let me have a peep through those binoculars. You may be seeing things."

"I am," Jack admitted joyously, handing over the glasses. "I'm seeing Ireland, or my name's not Jack Carew."

"Sure as you live," agreed Andy, beaming on the others.

"Well, none too soon," Don interrupted,

turning a serious face upon them. "I didn't want to hurry you fellows out of your sleep, seeing that you gave us three hours, but I want to tell you that even now we're pretty nearly up against it. Look at that!"

He pointed at the petrol gauge. It registered only enough, at their average rate of consumption, to carry them two-thirds of the estimated distance to where the welcome shores of Ireland hove dimly into sight in the distance.

"Climb out!" Jack ordered peremptorily. "You too," indicating Fred.

He climbed into his own seat, and motioned Andy into the other.

Without another word they began a long climb, the pounding of the engines indicating the extra pressure they were called upon to meet, the tilt of the plane indicating a sustained angle that was taking them onward but up, up, up.

Don stood directly behind Big Jack, his eye fastened upon the altimeter on the instrument board. Slowly, surely, unwaveringly. it was being pushed around the dial. It registered eight thousand feet, nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

He turned a questioning glance at Fred,

who was likewise engaged, but not a word was spoken.

Their glance turned to the petrol gauge, which Big Jack and Andy were watching as closely as they were the indications of their steadily increasing altitude. It showed an equally steady depletion as the engines literally ate up the now almost priceless fuel.

Don, his attention now turned to this instrument, saw it going down, down, down, even as the plane continued on its upward climb. Even yet the real significance of Jack's intention had not fully dawned upon him.

The fuel was by now dangerously low. Once Don thought he heard one of the engines "skip," and his heart skipped a beat in consequence. He looked again at the altimeter. Fifteen thousand feet! And still the plane was climbing, its angle unaltered.

He grabbed the binoculars and gazed out toward the coast, now scarcely any nearer the plane by actual distance, but much nearer from a plumb line which might have been dropped from the plane. He estimated that they were as yet about fifteen miles out to sea.

And still the machine climbed. He turned

again to the altimeter, fascinated by this great contest between the wits of man and the natural elements.

Eighteen thousand feet, and the needle, still continuing its circle of the dial, registered nineteen thousand before he could tear his glance away.

Bang! Sput, sput! Bang!

One of the engines was missing audibly. The petrol indicator now registered almost nothing. The altimeter needle was just flirting with the point marking twenty thousand feet.

Jack for the first time took his eyes from a straightaway upward course and gazed about him—principally outward and downward toward the Irish coast.

The petrol gauge registered nothing noticeable and both engines were firing now at interrupted intervals only, and the propellers were spinning in jerky uneven response to the queer spurts of power shot to them from the well-nigh exhausted engines.

Jack grabbed the petrol pump, and with a few sudden lusty jerks sent the remaining dregs of fuel into the engines. They responded nobly with what little ammunition they got, and with this power the plane gave

a loop, like a scenic railway car taking a hump, and what had been the upward angle was reversed.

The ingenious purpose was now apparent. The throttles were closed because there was no longer any use in keeping them open. Jack was trying the only course that had been left open to them. He had mounted to the greatest possible height with what little fuel they had left, while still continuing their eastward direction.

They were now on a great ten-mile downward glide which was their only hope of reaching somewhere near the coast line. How successful they were in this depended now upon the skill with which the captain-pilot used the plane's momentum.

Although with no propelling power whatever, they rapidly gathered a terrific speed. When this had reached a point where it threatened to tear the wings or rudder loose, Jack lifted her to an almost horizontal course, and the plane sailed along for more than a mile before it became necessary to again turn her nose down to gather increased momentum. When this was had the same process was repeated.

How good a pilot Jack was, this situation

would develop. They had come perhaps five miles nearer the shore line now, and they were still some twelve or thirteen thousand feet in the air. A swift glance at the altimeter and barometer assuring him of this fact, and Jack permitted himself a smile which gave heart and renewed courage to each of the other three.

"We'll make it easy if nothing gives way," he said.

Again they were gathering a speed even more terrible than that which had marked the first stage of their descent. When the plane was "brought to" again, it sailed landward for nearly two miles.

They were now only eight thousand feet up, and the distance to shore was probably three or three and a half miles. Jack decided to give them a little sensation. He pointed the nose of the craft directly at where the waves broke into little rollers on the shore, and let her go.

Don, sticking his head out of a window of the nacelle for an instant, thought that the top of his anatomy had been lifted off. Involuntarily he put his hand up to see if his scalp was still there.

Down, down, down they rushed, and still no alteration in their course.

They were about a thousand yards from the shore line, and approximately the same distance above the water, when Jack altered course, came to an almost horizontal position, executed a long arc and then, with the decreased speed, gradually dropped and at the same time swerved gently shoreward. Three minutes later, and without a propeller turning, without any aid whatever toward bringing them to a stop or impelling them forward, they came to the surface and to a standstill in a shoal-protected section of comparatively still water, two hundred feet from shore.

"Greatest piece of work I ever saw," exclaimed Don enthusiastically, grasping Jack's hand.

"The principal thing is that we did it, and here we are on European soil," said Jack, as, having already sounded the depth with a rope and sinker, and finding it less than three feet, he stepped overboard to wade ashore.

The others followed. From the solid ground of Ireland they looked back on the brave craft which had brought them there. A murmur of thanksgiving welled from each heart.

"We'll get a caretaker, and then be off on the last leg of our journey," Jack announced, as they trudged off up the incline toward where they believed they would find friendly welcome and perhaps a hot breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Runaway Plane

THE four lads had not progressed more than a couple of hundred yards, however, when suddenly and without warning, apparently out of nowhere, there developed one of those sporadic but furious wind storms which in reality are miniature hurricanes, though seldom doing any real damage.

It started with what seemed to be but a slight puff of wind, which went zephyring merrily on its innocent way. But this was only the forerunner, the vanguard, so to speak, of something more substantial to follow—as the four young men speedily learned.

Over the crest of the hill ahead of them appeared what at first seemed to be nothing more than a heavy mist. As a matter of fact, for several seconds it failed to attract any attention. Then Big Jack, regarding it rather curiously, called the attention of the others to it.

It was approaching with increasing speed,

and as it came nearer it was apparent that it was a vast twisting, swirling cloud of dust and dirt that was being carried along in the teeth of a strong wind. It seemed to be gathering momentum every foot of the way.

When it was within a few feet of them the lads followed a natural instinct and bent their heads to avoid the full blast of the pelting sand and dirt.

It enveloped them like a typical desert storm and lasted longer than any of them had expected it would. Even when it was over they were not able to immediately resume their way.

Big Jack and Don were for the moment out of commission, both having been temporarily blinded by the particles of dirt that got into their eyes; while Fred was making frantic efforts toward what seemed an attempt to stand on his head, though in reality he was trying to shake out of his shirt a great quantity of sand that had sifted down there. Andy was running around in circles, vainly peering into the air in search of his hat.

In a wild lurch for it, just as it took another upward swerve, he collided with Fred, sending that youth sprawling face downward over the ground.

Jack and Don both recovered their vision just in time to witness this unscheduled event, and to see Andy's hat come down fifty feet up the hill—another freak of such a storm—instead of somewhere down near the sea, where it might have been expected to land.

"I don't see anything funny in that," Fred complained, as he and the other two came up to where Andy, having recovered his top-piece, was awaiting them.

"In what?" Andy asked, seeing that Fred was addressing him.

"Why, in kicking a fellow when he's not looking—the way you just did to me."

"I didn't kick you, old acrobat," Andy explained good-naturedly. "You just got in the way, and believe me, I was going so I couldn't stop."

"Humph! Better look where you're headin' next time," Fred warned.

"Well, so near as I could make out, you were headin' toward China," Andy answered soothingly. "What was it you were looking for?"

But before Fred could make an answer it became apparent that they were in for another siege like the first.

Another gust of wind, equally sand-laden,

appeared over the brow of the hill. This time the four lads turned their backs to the approaching gale. As they did so, and just before it enveloped them, they saw the first cloud pass out to sea. So, also, did something else.

Big Jack was perhaps the first to see it, though each caught just a fleeting glimpse before the second miniature hurricane wrapped itself about them.

All started as though by instinct back toward the shore. But they could not see a thing for several seconds, until the cloud of dust, traveling even faster than they were, got ahead of them and lifted upward over the water.

What they saw then was disconcerting, startling.

The big hydro-plane which had brought them from America to Europe, and which, in their happiness and enthusiasm at having safely arrived on European soil, they had utterly forgotten to anchor, evidently thinking that like the old farm house it would "stand without hitching", was in the full teeth of the wind, headed back toward the land of its birth!

The involuntary exclamation that escaped

Big Jack as a burst of speed put him in the lead of the others, was like the cry of a savage chief, rallying his followers for the hunt. And it had just that effect upon the others.

Nothing else counted just now but getting back that sea-wandering plane. It was not a calculated or reasoned or thought-out proceeding, but a blind rushing after something that had gotten away—as, for instance, one will risk all sorts of dangers in unthinkingly rushing into the street and amidst traffic after a hat that has blown away.

As Big Jack reached the edge of the water, only a few feet ahead of the other three, he did not even diminish his speed, but with a great splash waded in, followed by the others.

In a few seconds all were beyond wading depth and swimming vigorously.

But, excellent swimmers though all of them were, it was a risky and even foolhardy adventure at best; for they were fully clothed, and there was no telling how far the plane might be carried before the wind rose sufficiently above the surface to release it from its grip.

For ten minutes they swam gallantly, and then it became apparent that the direction of the wind had swerved and was following a line almost parallel with the shore.

In a scattered line, Big Jack now well in the lead, Andy next, then, some distance behind, Fred and Don, close together, they continued with all their strength for another quarter of an hour.

It was probably a glance shoreward, which gave him his first inkling of how far out to sea they had gone, that gave Jack Carew the courage to put all his remaining strength into a final spurt. He realized that he was pretty far spent himself, and the slowing up of the others indicated that the awful gruelling was having its effect on them the same way.

The wind had died down and here was the chance of reaching the wayward plane. Big Jack never strove harder than he did then. When he was almost in reach of the hydro he heard a muffled cry behind him. It was Andy, almost exhausted.

He measured the distance. He saw Fred and Don come up with Andy and grasp the exhausted swimmer, one on either side.

"They'll be all right for a minute," he muttered. "But we'll all be out if we don't get the plane now."

A dozen lusty strokes took him to where the big craft was now lying motionless on the water. For several seconds he hung to the

side, too weak to lift himself aboard. Then came another cry from where the other three were struggling in the water, thirty feet away.

Big Jack took in the situation at a glance. Andy was unable to help himself, and he was too much for the other weakened swimmers to handle. It was a desperate moment.

"Hey, you, Andy!" Jack shouted, in a peremptory, seemingly angry tone. "Tread water!"

Andy heard and seemed to realize. The others could not waste an ounce of strength in talk, but as Andy followed directions and so relieved them somewhat of his weight, they shot appreciative looks at Jack.

It was all up to him now. They couldn't make the plane with Andy. They couldn't abandon him to drown there.

"Steady!" shouted Jack. "I'll have the plane there in a minute."

So saying he jumped off the other side, and, throwing his whole weight in the plunge, and kicking out with all his strength, started the plane in the direction of the other three.

It was a long, killing task, but he did it, just as Andy's head went under. Don, now almost exhausted, grasped at a wing of the plane to save himself.

"Get on there, too!" Jack shouted to Fred as he dived for Andy. He came up an instant later, with the half-drowned man in his grasp.

Fred and Don were by now in the plane. Jack, puffing rapidly, held Andy's head above the water, while the other two caught their breath. Then, with the last effort they had in them, they hauled the unconscious Andy aboard, and Jack struggled up after him.

It was Jack now who was near the end of his tether. He had done nearly twice as much work as the others, and he had for the moment used up his last ounce of tremendous strength.

"Lay Andy across that frame," he weakly directed the other two. With great difficulty they followed his directions. But already Andy was showing signs of returning consciousness.

They left him where he was. There was nothing else any of them could do. They lay where they had sprawled, each gasping weakly for breath. When Andy opened his eyes it was to see them thus—and the shore line almost three miles away!

Andy moved slightly. It is altogether likely that at that moment he hadn't the slightest idea or recollection of where he was. The movement, however, was calculated to

bring a sudden and somewhat rude awakening. Limp and to all appearances lifeless, Andy had been "hung" across the framework with a nicety of balance which the others at the time had not realized. When he moved all was different.

The equilibrium was lost, and Andy, with one wild and ineffective grasp at the empty air, came down with a thump and a grunt —a very life-like grunt—into the fuselage of the plane.

Despite their own miseries, the others could not help but smile. Andy gave a puzzled glance around, seemed to have his first realization of where he was, and, perhaps, an inkling of how he got there, and then he, too, grinned weakly.

Thus they lay for twenty minutes or half an hour, unable to do aught but watch the slowly receding line of shore, as parallel with it, they drifted southward.

This steady drift, however, was presenting a new menace. At any time wind or current might change to send them out to sea. To permit that would be to flirt with death from starvation and thirst, for there wasn't an ounce of petrol left in the tanks.

In an hour all had so far recovered as to

permit a hasty counsel. They speedily reached a decision that there was but one thing to do, and that must be done at once. They must get the plane back to shore, and the only way that could be done was by one or two of them swimming, to give propulsion to the craft.

It promised to be a long and difficult task, but it presented none of the dangers that attended their swimming in the open sea. It was mearly a matter of pairing off, and, two at a time, dropping over the sides, and, holding to the craft, pushing outward with their feet, the same as though they were swimming.

Jack and Don went at it first, and for half an hour they worked heroically, appreciably diminishing the distance between the craft and shore, but still leaving what seemed to be nearly two miles intervening. Then they were relieved by the now recovered Andy and Fred.

Thus alternating, they kept at the task for two hours, and the sun dipped in the western waters and twilight came before they were within what they could consider a safe distance of land.

It was Jack and Don who finished up the last lap, and, as darkness fell, brought the craft back into shallow water.

But they were upon an entirely different part of the coast—a barren, rocky section, apparently without inhabitants.

Fortunately each had, in the locker of the plane, a change of clothes. These they brought ashore, but not a match could they find.

Having securely anchored the craft this time, they entered a little grove, some hundred yards or more from the shore, and there changed their clothes, hanging the wet garments on the limbs of the trees to dry.

"We can't do more tonight," Jack yawned, when this job was completed. "I'm nearly dead, and I guess you fellows are, too. There's no sign of a house anywhere around here, so I guess we'll have to bunk on the ground for tonight."

"Suits me," said Andy Flures, wearily. "I could sleep anywhere."

With their arms for pillows they stretched out on the softest ground they could find, and before fifteen minutes had elapsed four husky but tired-out young men were snoring lustily and rapidly regaining their rest in sleep.

There is a time when Nature takes her toll, no matter what the worldly matters may be at stake.

CHAPTER XIX

The Sleep-Walker

IT was well past three o'clock in the morning, though he had no means then of knowing the time, when Andy Flures turned stiffly upon his hard couch of Mother Earth, rubbed his eyes, then his sore joints, finally recollected where he was and looked about casually at the others in the group.

Though they were in a thin grove of trees, the soft light of a full moon bathed the landscape with a brightness that made everything easily visible.

Andy sat up to limber his joints the more. As he did so he wondered how the others felt.

"Pretty narrow escape all of us had today," he murmured to himself; and added, "Especially narrow for Andy."

He looked down at Fred, who was close beside him. He was snoring peacefully. He glanced over at Don, and he, too, seemed none the worse for the day's terrible work. His eye traveled on. He turned his head suddenly, and then peered all around with

something of a panicky feeling coming over him.

He uttered an unconscious exclamation, and Fred moved and muttered in his sleep. Andy jumped up and walked around the grove, circling over an area of thirty or forty feet. Then he came back hurriedly to where Don and Fred lay sleeping.

Big Jack Carew was nowhere to be found, and for the first time it came to Andy with a terrible shock that there were times when, thoroughly exhausted, Carew became a somnambulist.

He dropped to his knees beside Fred and shook him mercilessly, at the same time calling Don.

Both men awakened about the same time; neither for the moment having any knowledge of where they were; both muttering against this rude awakening.

"You remember, the plane got away from us; we swam after it; we nearly drowned—all of us," Andy repeated hurriedly. "Remember?"

"Yes," Don answered, sitting up and sensing somehow that something was wrong.

"Well, why tell us about it now?" Fred complained sleepily.

"It's Jack I'm trying to tell you about," Andy answered in a shrill whisper. "He's gone. He isn't anywhere about the grove."

Don was on his feet in an instant, at the same time muttering a groan as he too suddenly put his stiffened joints into action.

The significance of the situation also began to sink into Fred's sleepy brain, and he, too, arose, demanding to know what had awakened Andy, and was he sure Jack was not playing a joke on them, or perhaps had gone down to take a look at the plane.

"He was too tired out for that sort of a joke," Andy responded, showing his apprehension in his voice. "And as for the plane, he knew that was safe enough."

"Do you think he's sleep-walking again?" Don asked nervously, still trying to rub the sleep from his eyes.

"I'm afraid so," Andy replied. "That's the reason I wakened you two." He addressed himself particularly to Don: "You remember that night after the all-day struggle with the Germans."

"I'll not forget it soon," Don answered, buttoning his coat and shuddering, although it was not cold.

"What was that?" demanded Fred. "What happened at that time?"

"We three had to bunk up much as we did tonight," Andy explained. "It was while you were on another sector. We had had a mighty tough day. Along toward the middle of the night Don awakened just as I did tonight, and he missed Jack. He called me. We couldn't find him anywhere. We had heard about his sometimes walking in his sleep, but we'd never had any experience. A search though, proved that he must have gone that way. Luckily, we picked up a police dog, and from Jack's paraphernalia we gave him the scent. He led us for half an hour straight toward the German lines, and when we were almost in sight of their outposts, there was Jack, tramping along, head up, but dead asleep. Ugh! It was the wierdest thing I ever went through, and we had to waken him gently to avoid a nerve shock."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Fred. "I never heard of that. You never told me a thing about it."

"Never thought to, I guess," Don answered. "Never liked to think about it, anyway."

"And we haven't any police dog with us tonight," Andy supplemented. "I haven't the slightest doubt but that he's wandered off

from here the same way, but how we're going to get his trail is what is worrying me."

Each of them experiencing a creepy sort of feeling, they emerged from the grove for a survey of the landscape. Not a clue did it reveal.

Don dropped to the ground in a vain effort to discover footprints, but the surface was so hard, and the moonlight so pale, that he found this a useless effort.

"I'm not usually superstitious," Fred said, finally, "but there are times when, nothing else being available, at least it doesn't do any harm to try something of that sort. I've heard it said that in such circumstances, when a thing has been lost or something like that, a feather tossed in the air will, as it comes to the ground, indicate the direction of the article sought. There is just a chance it might help here."

"But we haven't any feather," Andy complained helplessly.

"Doesn't necessarily have to be a feather," said Don. "Anything of the sort will do."

So saying he turned out the lining of his coat, swiftly tore a piece from it, rolled it into the semblance of a ball and tossed it as high as its light weight would permit into

the air. It fluttered there for a moment and then flitted lightly downward, carried this way and that as it rode the air.

But one thing the eager lads grasped at as significant: although they could not discern the slightest movement of the air, the piece of flimsy goods took a distinctly northerly direction and fell at a spot at least three feet in front of where Don had stood when he threw it.

"We'll try it, anyway," he said, leading the way.

They stalked forth without other guide than the fateful falling of the bit of silken cloth. Their path led along the shore where the waves of a calm sea lapped ceaselessly in a crooning lullaby. To the lads, on their unhappy mission, it had a wierd, wild, unnerving sound.

They walked rapidly, close together, searching the ground for footprints, and as far ahead as they could see for any indication of the missing man.

"Look!" said Don, with startling suddenness, as he, somewhat in the lead, came to a spot where the ground was softer. The other two dropped to their knees beside him. There was no mistaking the fresh foot-prints,

nor the fact that they were of about the size of Big Jack Carew's shoe.

"The sign was right!" exclaimed Andy, his voice shaky. "He has passed this way, and not long ago."

They arose and hastened onward. For a considerable distance the surface was sufficiently soft to plainly show the prints and they were able to jog along at a slow run. Then the ground suddenly became hard and rocky and began to rise in hilly sections.

"No more foot-prints," said Andy, "but the best thing we can do is to keep right on".

"Great guns!" exclaimed Fred, almost before Andy was through. He could say nothing more, but stood as though transfixed, pointing ahead and upward.

There, in plain sight of all, was Big Jack Carew, walking along the brow of a hill and headed straight toward where the jagged rocks ended over a cliff sheer over the ocean.

Fred cupped his hands to his mouth as though to shout.

"No! No!" Don warned. "Don't do that!"

He broke into a run and the others followed. The way was hard going, and several times they stumbled. It was a race against Fate,

with the unconscious Jack Carew steadily nearing the cliff that would mean his instant death.

Don fell, and the other two continued on, his voice following them, bidding them not to lose an instant. He had strained a tendon and from that time on he made painful progress.

But he was in time to see Andy, breathless and nearly exhausted, come up with Jack when the other was not ten feet from the edge of the precipice.

Andy took no chances, and Don could have cheered as he saw him make a flying football tackle, catching Big Jack just above the ankles and throwing him heavily to the ground.

Fred arrived at that instant and sat down heavily on the big fellow's stomach.

As Don came up, Jack was just coming to his senses, his eyes indicating that he was not yet fully aware of where he was or of what had happened.

His first question indicated this, but no one was as yet sufficiently master of himself to answer. Fred merely waved a hand toward the cliff and the ocean below. Big Jack seemed slowly to comprehend. For an instant

he buried his face in his hand. A shudder ran over his big frame. He looked again toward where the rocks fell off sheer to the water below, and then put out his hand.

All three grasped it at once. There was no need of words: all understood, and most of all, Big Jack.

Silently they arose, and, walking slowly because of Don's lameness, headed back toward the grove.

They were half way there before anyone spoke. It was Jack.

"Who discovered I was gone?" he asked.

Don answered that it was Andy. Big Jack simply nodded, but he placed upon Andy's shoulder a shaking hand which said more than words.

There was something almost tragic about this rescue of a man who that very day had rescued all of them.

"Well," said Andy, always the first to recover, "it's over. Let's not think about it. Here we are, almost at the grove, and by jiminy, day's breaking."

And so it was. Dawn was chasing the moon, and daylight was only a matter of a quarter or half an hour.

They entered the grove and sat down.

Andy bound a handkerchief tightly about Don's strained leg, and they discussed their plans for the immediate future.

"Well," said Fred, in the midst of this, "we know there's no road or human habitation in that direction," indicating from whence they had just come. "I suggest that our next effort be over there."

He pointed toward a gently rising slope to the north, and even as they looked the increasing daylight showed them that there lay what seemed to be a rough and seldom-used road.

"Right," said Jack. "That little jaunt of mine was rather tiring: Give me about fifteen or twenty minutes more and we'll see what we can discover out there."

They sat about chatting for another quarter of an hour. Then, Jack indicating that he felt fit, they took one more survey to make sure that the plane was still riding safely where they had anchored it the night before, and made ready to explore the unpromising road, in the hope of finding fellow human beings and perhaps breakfast. For by this time they felt nearly starved.

CHAPTER XX

Kidnaped

"WHAT'S that?" Don demanded suddenly, before they had made the crest of the hill.

All had heard the sound, or rather series of sounds, to which he referred; all stopped still to listen.

It was the steady, powerful chug-chug of a motor, and at first they thought it was another plane.

"Motorboat, but a fast one," said Jack, in expert diagnosis.

"Yes, and from the sound of it, coming this way," Andy added.

"We can probably see it from the brow of this hill," Fred suggested, and they continued the two hundred feet or more to the point indicated.

There they stopped to survey that surface of the sea which previously had been obscured. A motorboat was racing madly up the coast, toward where their hydro lay, and at sight of them one of the crew on the craft set up a

loud shout and a frantic waving of his arms. Two others on the boat came to his side, as she changed her course with an evident intention of drawing up close to where the plane washed idly back and forth on the calm surface of the sea.

"Seem to want us," said Big Jack, "but surely we can't be on private property."

"Yes, they're coming ashore all right—six of them," Fred announced, watching them climb out of the powerful and speedy launch.

"May want to get their bearings," Jack suggested. "Well, we'll stroll back and see what they want."

They started back down the hill, and the six men again were obscured from their view. As the youths came past a thickly wooded spot, however, four of the men suddenly appeared, breathing heavily from having climbed the steep incline.

"You the mail crew?" the one who seemed to be the leader asked.

"Gosh, no," Andy, who was in the lead, responded. "We just got over from America."

"From America!" the leader responded in apparent great surprise. He gazed from one to another of the four lads, as though expecting some further explanation, and stuck his

hands into his coat pockets, standing with feet apart, seemingly aghast.

"Transatlantic contest?" he asked finally.

"Not exactly," Jack answered, anxious to oblige. "Business of a rather private nature."

"Huh," the stranger grunted, his whole attitude and demeanor instantly changing. "Then I guess you're the young fellows we're looking for. Stick up yer hands." And he whipped out a vicious-looking revolver, while his three companions, also with guns drawn, covered Jack, Don and Fred.

"What's the—" Jack began, and looked behind them. The other two men had taken a different route, and without making a sound had crept up. They also handled revolvers menacingly.

"We're the welcoming committee," the leader informed Jack, in answer to his exclamation. "Must say you kept us waiting some time, too. We've been hanging around here for two whole days. Began to think we'd missed you."

Despite his complete familiarity with the English language, Jack detected that the man spoke with a decided accent. A moment later he addressed one of the others in what seemed to the lads to be a corruption of German and some guttural dialect.

"You were on your way up the hill," the leader suggested. "Going any place in particular?"

"No; only looking for some breakfast," Jack answered, believing it would be best to seem conciliatory. "Why the reception committee and this rather unusual welcome?"

"Believe you've got some papers on you we'd like to borrow for a little time?" the leader of the gang replied.

"Papers?" Jack repeated, as though mystified. "Cigarette?"

"No kiddin', friend," the man replied gruffly. "You know what we mean. We won't ask you to come across now. We'll wait until we get indoors."

They were by now approaching a great rambling and seemingly almost completely abandoned and dilapidated house, which stood off upon a bleak cliff where it looked as though the first stiff gale would carry it away.

"That's our destination—or rather, yours," the ruffian informed them, seeing the youths gazing at the wrecked remains of the old structure.

Jack managed to catch the eyes of his companions for a second when their strange captors were not aware. He gave a quick

wink indicative of the fact that they were to leave leadership to him. All showed that they understood.

Surrounded on either side and the rear by the armed men, the youths approached what they suddenly realized was to be made their prison.

"Wait," commanded the leader, as they reached the door.

He stepped in first and took a position at the far side of the damp, dark room, and then commanded the others to enter, each under a guard.

"Now then," he exclaimed, "are you going to come across peacefully?"

Jack looked him squarely in the eye for fully half a minute, then deliberately winked, knowingly.

The leader regarded him with poorly-disguised surprise, then seemed to grasp his meaning.

"Here," he demanded curtly, indicating the way through another door, "I want to talk to you."

They passed into the other room, the revolver within a foot of Jack's head. Once out of sight of the others, however, and he smiled meaningly, leaning close to his captor

and whispering, "Upstairs," at the same time nodding toward the stairway.

"What for?" the man asked, suspiciously.

"I know what you want," Jack responded. "I guess we can get along all right. No use letting the others in on it. Maybe I can tell you something in addition, if you make it worth while."

A gleam of cunning came into the man's eye. "Go ahead," he acquiesced, pointing toward the stairs. Then he went to the doorway again and said a few words to his fellow bandits in the same strange language he had used before.

Jack led the way up the rickety staircase, and, seemingly unconscious of the fact, went toward the extreme rear of the house. Without obvious haste he stepped into the rearmost room, and the leader of the band followed.

He was unprepared for what followed. With the speed of lightning he found his gun hand in one iron grip, while another was choking the breath out of him. Powerful as he was, he found himself helpless against the almost superhuman strength of the young giant he had sought to trap.

Slowly, surely, with irresistible force, Jack pushed him back, step by step, toward where

a great bundle of old clothing and rags was piled into a corner. When he had got the fellow almost directly over this, he even more tightly gripped his throat, while at the same time keeping him in a position where he could not strike with his left hand, and then commanded, "Drop that gun!"

The man merely writhed in a fast weakening effort to free himself. Already his face was turning gray and his eyes were bulging.

"Drop that gun or you never leave this room alive," Jack breathed into his ear again.

The fellow twitched frantically, evidently measured the determination written upon Jack's face, and with what would have been a groan could he have made a really audible sound, he dropped the revolver so that it fell noiselessly upon the bundle of rags.

For several seconds more Jack held the other man in his killing grip, and then, just when he was about to lose consciousness, he released him, at the same time grabbing up the gun and placing it at the bandit's temple.

The fellow dropped weak and limp upon the heap of débris. Jack glanced about the room and could have shouted with joy. Several yards of rope with which the gang undoubtedly had intended to tie their prisoners lay coiled

up in an opposite corner. He procured it, keeping the man covered at every second, and then approached him.

"Roll over on your stomach," he commanded. The man did as he was ordered. Hastily Jack felt all his pockets for trace of another weapon. Finding none, he commanded the man to roll over on his back, first having placed a part of the rope where his body would come. Working with one hand, the menacing pistol in the other, Jack then, with a few quick twists and knots, tied the fellow fast.

"Now call one of the others," he commanded of the bandit leader, dragging him to where he would not be visible to anyone approaching the door. "Call one, and only one; if two come I'll kill you instantly."

The man maintained a stubborn silence. Jack pushed the gun against his forehead. The man winced and drew back. The pressure of the gun was increased. Abruptly the fellow called out for one of his companions to step upstairs for a moment.

"Give the slightest warning and you're done," Jack threatened. As the second man could be heard coming down the hallway, Jack took a position along the wall, close to

the door. Just as the fellow appeared the powerful fist of the young giant shot out with sledge-hammer force, catching the unprepared victim directly on the point of the jaw. He went down without a sound, and before he regained consciousness he was bound, gagged and thrown helpless into a dark corner.

Three times was this repeated, and then Jack, forcing a gag into the leader's mouth, so that no one could utter a cry of warning to the single bandit remaining on guard below, tiptoed downstairs and had that fellow covered with his gun before the man was aware of his presence.

He made as though to shoot, but Jack was too quick for him. He fired before the bandit could get his arm raised, and the bullet caught him directly through the wrist.

"Quick!" Jack ordered, snatching up the revolver which the wounded man had dropped upon the floor. "They may have confederates. We can't take a chance in wasting time around here."

At break-neck speed he led the way down the hill, along the shore-line and to the anchored motorboat. As Fred, who was last, jumped aboard, Jack started the engine, grabbed the wheel, and in two minutes they

were racing out of the little bay at thirty miles an hour, leaving a great, white-capped trough in their wake.

It might have been twenty miles or so that they traveled along the shore-line, when they sighted a thriving town.

"Guess we can find a telegraph office here," said Jack, "and maybe we can get a train for Liverpool or Dover."

They ran the speed craft close up to one of the piers and jumped ashore.

As they did so their attention was attracted by a shrill whistle. Even as they located its source they saw two policemen hurrying toward them.

"You're under arrest," one of them announced as they came up to the four young men.

"For what?" Jack demanded, impatient at what threatened to be further delay.

"As spies in the employ of an enemy Government," the policeman answered, his hand near to the pocket containing his gun.

"You're wrong; we're Americans," the big leader of the four protested.

"That's a good one," the officer responded sarcastically. "Come along now, and tell it to the inspector in charge."

And despite their protests, and notwithstanding the fact that the fate of the world literally hung upon the passage of every minute now, they were led away to the police station and for two hours were held up there, submitting proofs and making explanations to show that they were, indeed, the special envoys of the American Government, and not the bandit gang which made its quarters in the abandoned house on the cliff.

CHAPTER XXI

The Arrival in Paris

"AHEM! Ah—." The captain of police cleared his throat twice and turned to the four young men apologetically.

"I have just received a telegram from Paris," he said, referring to a sheet of paper he held in his hand. "I guess your mission is as important as you stated. I am sorry you were delayed, but you will realize that it was not done intentionally. You were in the boat, you know, that those fugitives were known to have been using."

"Oh, we won't quarrel over the mistake," Jack assured him quickly. "What we are principally interested in now is getting to the Peace Conference. You can make up for the delay by expediting that, perhaps."

"We already have arranged for that," the police official replied. "If you will accompany me I will show you an aeroplane which is entirely at your disposal for the balance of your journey."

"Ah!" Jack exclaimed, pleasure lighting his face.

"Great!" Andy supplemented quickly.

In ten minutes they were climbing into a biplane, of course of nothing approaching the speed and power of that in which they had made the Transatlantic flight, but nevertheless of sufficient capacity to carry them direct to Versailles.

Three hours later, five of them being crowded upon the relatively small plane—the extra man being an Englishman, acting as pilot—they flew out across the English Channel and toward the shores of France. Before night they were over French soil and coming nearer every minute to the little city of their objective.

A wireless in advance had apprised the American delegation there of the fact of their safe arrival in England, and of their start upon the last leg of the trip. As they came above Paris, and the pilot finally circled downward toward the landing field, a great throng came rushing forward, evidently having had more than an inkling of who they were and what their mission.

As their machine rolled over the ground to a slow stop, a man in uniform and evidently

of considerable importance thereabouts, stepped through the crowd and addressed the men in French.

Fred, the only one who was at all fluent in that language, responded. For several minutes they conversed, then Bentner turned to his companions.

"He extends to us the greetings of France," he explained, "and bids us follow him at once to where President Wilson, the Secretary of State, and several others of the American delegation await us."

"Can't we wash up a bit first?" Jack asked, really alarmed at the contemplation of going into such august company greased and grimy as they were.

The French officer shrugged his shoulders expressively. "It is not your appearance that counts," Fred translated his reply. "It is the importance of the documents you carry."

"True enough," Jack agreed.

Again the French officer was chattering volubly. The others awaited Fred's interpretation of it into English.

"He says," he began finally, "that he believes we have arrived just in the nick of time, and that in another hour or two it might have been too late."

"Let him take us at once to the President, then," Jack announced quickly. "We have no right to prolong the delay, now that we are actually in the city toward which we have been aiming for what now seems to me to have been years."

Fred indicated their desires to the Frenchman.

"Oui! Oui!" the latter exclaimed several times in succession, and led the way through the throng which parted for them, and toward an imposing building across a great public square.

Five minutes later they were in the presence of the President of the United States and the more important members of the American delegation.

"You have the documents?" asked the Secretary of State, after the President very briefly but very fervently had thanked the men for their courage and ability.

For answer, Jack undid his blouse, opened his clothing beneath, and produced a packet enclosed in a heavy reddish-brown envelope.

The premier of the American cabinet hastily opened it and took out the papers it contained. He counted them carefully, and then began a minute examination of their

signatures and certain secret markings which would not have been noticeable to anyone who did not know they were there.

"They are intact, sir," the Secretary of State finally announced, turning to the President.

"Very well," the latter replied, and he bowed to the young men in a way that not only expressed his profound gratitude, but the fact also that they might now consider themselves at liberty to take the long rest in which they were of so much need.

"Quarters already have been arranged for you, and I trust that you will find all the comforts and conveniences," the President announced, and they were ushered back across the square and to a splendid suite of rooms in one of the quietest and most exclusive hotels in Versailles.

CHAPTER XXII

World Peace Assured

AND thus it was that four lads from Brighton—the school which had contributed so much in manly courage to the winning of the world war—added new laurels to the name, not only by successfully carrying out the first Transatlantic aerial flight for the accomplishment of important governmental business, but by doing it upon a mission for the whole of civilization and humanity.

For, when these lads awakened, after a deserved sleep of more than twenty hours, it was to find the London newspapers laid out for them, the head-lines telling the marvels of their accomplishment.

Japan was appeased. The work of the Peace Conference again took to smooth channels. World confidence and world peace were again restored.

Small wonder that all civilization paid homage to the Brighton Boys who had saved the situation!

But if there was tribute to the boys while abroad, it was small and insignificant as compared with that which awaited them upon their arrival home.

The officials at Washington decided that the lads had indeed earned a rest from all nerve strain and fatigue, and so it was that they found placed at their disposal, after a two-days' rest at Versailles, the best facilities on one of the fastest Transatlantic liners.

They sailed from Liverpool three days later, but the news traveled long ahead of them. On the boat they were lionized. Upon their arrival in New York they were idolized.

They were treated as conquering heroes returning to their native land. And indeed that is what they were. For they had conquered not only almost every conceivable obstacle, including international intrigue, but they had established the fact that American grit could master the air and link the Old and the New Worlds in a quicker route than ever before was known.